PUBG VS FORTNITE
WHO'S THE KING OF BATTLE ROYALES? **VERDICT INSIDE...**



SWITCH BATTERY PACK AND STAND OFFER INSIDE!



PS4 | XBOX ONE | NINTENDO SWITCH | PC | 3DS | PS VITA | ANDROID | iOS

GAMES MASTER





EVOLUTION™

Create your own dinosaurs & unleash them on the world!

ALSO INSIDE



NEW INFO! **SPIDER-MAN**



HUGE REVEAL! **THE WALKING DEAD**



HANDS-ON! **THE CREW 2**

PLUS!

FIRST PLAY!
SHADOW OF THE TOMB RAIDER
Lara's most intense adventure yet

EXCLUSIVE!
MAKE YOUR OWN GAMES
Learn how with our easy step-by-step guide





BIG NEWS!
LEGO THE INCREDIBLES
Two movies in one game

The Cutest RPG Coming to Switch This Summer!





Available on Steam, PS4 and Nintendo e-Shop







pqube The Gentlebros

Copyright © 2018 • The Gentlebros. Published by PQube Ltd.

THE UK'S NO.1 MULTIFORMAT GAMES MAG
GAMES MASTER
Issue 330 / June 2018

"It very much embodies that spirit of dinosaur-driven chaos"

Everyone knows the classic Jurassic Park quote, "Life finds a way" – but few remember the full line, "Life finds a way out of its cage and starts eating the visitors." Thought-provoking stuff.

Jurassic World Evolution very much embodies that spirit of dinosaur-driven chaos, proving especially disaster-filled when we play it for some reason. I knew that if we didn't give it the cover feature treatment it deserves, and seize the excuse to put a ruddy great T. rex on the front cover, my inner child would never forgive me. And also that the developer would release a raptor into our office, as those blood-splattered letters have been threatening for months. Read on for our massive preview, including a chat with the team and even a look back on Jurassic Park games past.

Elsewhere, we're teaching you how to make your own games, deciding once and for all the best battle royale of the bunch, and stress-testing a load of cardboard, plus all the expert reviews, in-depth previews, and exclusive features you've come to expect from the best games mag around.

Enjoy your GM!

Robin

Robin Valentine – Editor

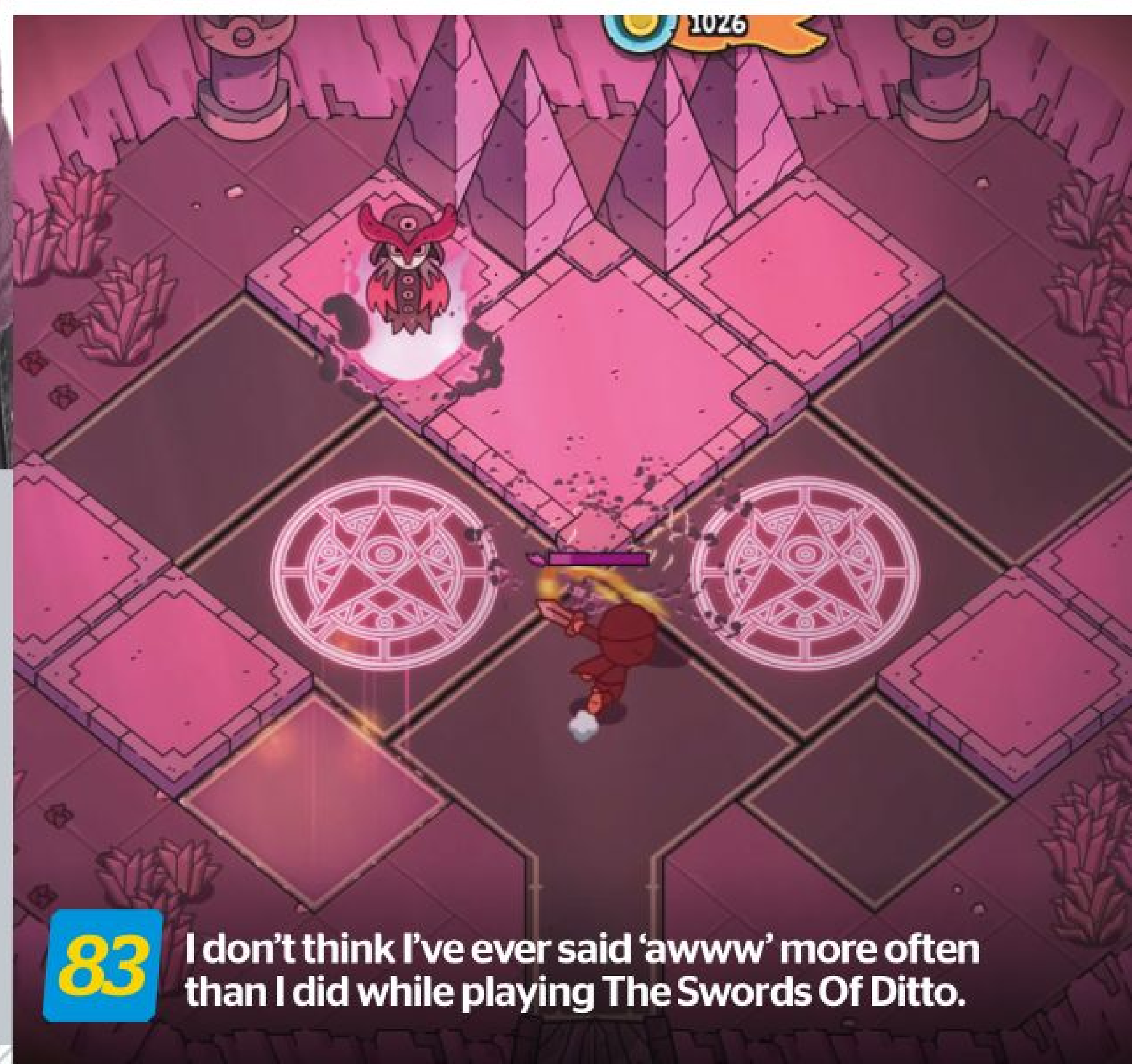
EDITOR'S CHOICE
MY TOP PICKS THIS ISSUE



34 We've been hands-on with Shadow Of The Tomb Raider, the dark final chapter...



66 Planet Alpha's making its bid for the Most Beautiful Alien Planet award, unaware that that doesn't exist.



83 I don't think I've ever said 'awww' more often than I did while playing The Swords Of Ditto.

GET MORE FROM YOUR GM!



Online at www.gamesradar.com/gamesmaster



...or subscribe. See p28 for details.

Contents

What's In Your Latest Issue?







GM Previews

GM Reviews

GM Regulars

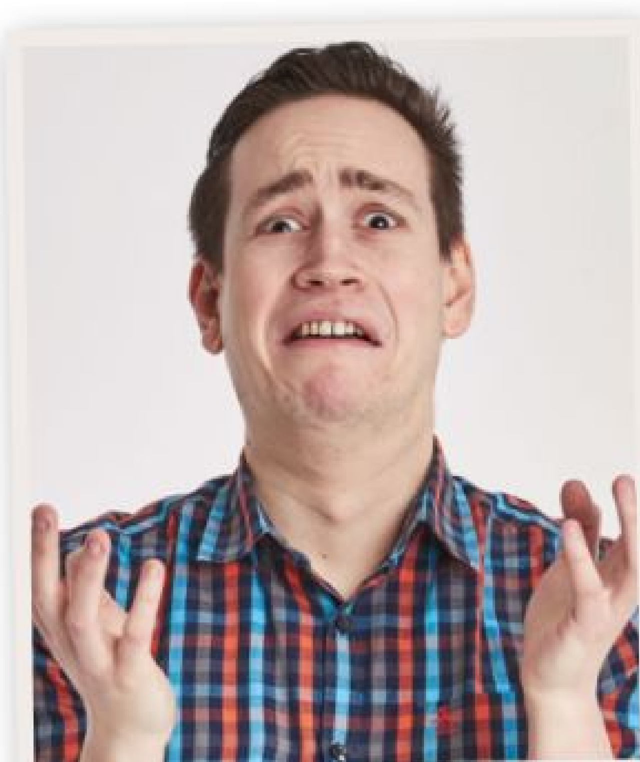
Team GM

Meet The Magazine's Makers!



THE MOST DEDICATED TEAM IN THE BUSINESS

After the photoshoot, we went for a drink with that T. rex, and we ended up getting on so well we've offered her a job. Next month she's joining GamesMaster as our new Staff Biter.



Robin Valentine
It's still a good month away, but Robin's already flailing around in full panic mode about E3. Journalists have a weird relationship with the biggest show in the gaming, you see – for them, it's sort of a cross between Christmas and the apocalypse.

Favourite dinosaur: Print media



Rob Crossland
Let our seemingly harmless art editor loose with Photoshop, and horrible things happen. We do what we can to keep him in check, but every now he gets away from us and makes something monstrous. You'll find his latest creation over on p98. Be afraid...

Favourite dinosaur: Doyouthinkhesaurus



Sam Greer
Did you know, our staff writer doesn't just review games, she makes them too? Just like Paul Hollywood with cakes. And this month she's sharing what she's learned in a huge guide to the best free and affordable game development tools around – flip to p60 to find out more.

Favourite dinosaur: Godzilla



NEVER MISS AN ISSUE!
Subscribe today and get a free Switch power pack
See p28 for details

Issue 330/June 2018



Future PLC, Quay House, The Ambury, Bath BA1 1UA

Editorial
Editor **Robin Valentine**
robin.valentine@futurenet.com
01225 442 244
Art Editor **Rob Crossland**
Operations Editor **Miriam McDonald**
Staff Writer **Sam Greer**

Contributors
Anne-Marie Coyle, Ian Dransfield, Matthew Elliott, Ian Evenden, Corey Gittins, Georgine Hodsdon, Leon Hurley, Phil Iwaniuk, Luke Kemp, James McMahon, David Meikleham, Cliff Newman, Laurence Phillips, Aaron Potter, Chris Schilling, Alan Wen

Advertising
Media packs are available on request
Commercial Director **Clare Dove**
clare.dove@futurenet.com
Account Director, Games **Kevin Stoddart**
kevin.stoddart@futurenet.com
01225 687 455
Director of Agency Sales **Matt Downs**

International
GamesMaster is available for licensing. Contact the International department to discuss partnership opportunities
International Licensing Director **Matt Ellis**
matt.ellis@futurenet.com

Subscriptions
Email enquiries **gamesmaster@myfavouritemagazines.co.uk**
UK orderline & enquiries **0844 848 2852**
Overseas order line and enquiries **+44 (0)1604 251045**
Online orders & enquiries **www.myfavouritemagazines.co.uk**
Head of subscriptions **Sharon Todd**

Circulation
Head of Newstrade **Tim Mathers**

Production
Head of Production **Mark Constance**
Production Project Manager **Clare Scott**
Advertising Production Manager **Joanne Crosby**
Digital Editions Controller **Jason Hudson**
Production Manager **Frances Twentyman**

Management
Managing Director **Julian March**
Commercial Finance Director **Dan Jotcham**
Group Content Director **Paul Newman**
Head of Art & Design **Rodney Dive**
Group Editor-in-Chief **Tony Mott**
Senior Art Editor **Warren Brown**

Printed by William Gibbons & Sons Ltd on behalf of Future

Distributed by Marketforce, 5 Churchill Place, Canary Wharf, London, E14 5HU www.marketforce.co.uk Tel: 0203 787 9060

Next issue on sale 14 June 2018

SSN 0967-9855

We are committed to only using magazine paper which is derived from responsibly managed, certified forestry and chlorine-free manufacture. The paper in this magazine was sourced and produced from sustainable managed forests, conforming to strict environmental and socioeconomic standards. The manufacturing paper mill holds full FSC (Forest Stewardship Council) certification and accreditation

All contents © 2018 Future Publishing Limited or published under licence. All rights reserved. No part of this magazine may be used, stored, transmitted or reproduced in any way without the prior written permission of the publisher. Future Publishing Limited (company number 2008885) is registered in England and Wales. Registered office: Quay House, The Ambury, Bath BA1 1UA. All information contained in this publication is for information only and is, as far as we are aware, correct at the time of going to press. Future cannot accept any responsibility for errors or inaccuracies in such information. You are advised to contact manufacturers and retailers directly with regard to the price of products/services referred to in this publication. Apps and websites mentioned in this publication are not under our control. We are not responsible for their contents or any other changes or updates to them. This magazine is fully independent and not affiliated in any way with the companies mentioned herein.

If you submit material to us, you warrant that you own the material and/or have the necessary rights/permissions to supply the material and you automatically grant Future and its licensees a licence to publish your submission in whole or in part in any/all issues and/or editions of publications, in any format published worldwide and on associated websites, social media channels and associated products. Any material you submit is sent at your own risk and, although every care is taken, neither Future nor its employees, agents, subcontractors or licensees shall be liable for loss or damage. We assume all unsolicited material is for publication unless otherwise stated, and reserve the right to edit, amend, adapt all submissions.



Future plc is a public company quoted on the London Stock Exchange (symbol: FUTR)
www.futureplc.com

Chief executive **Zillah Byng-Thorne**
Non-executive chairman **Richard Huntingford**
Chief financial officer **Penny Ladkin-Brand**

Tel +44 (0)1225 442 244




Switch's hybrid nature allows Nintendo to unify its catalogue on one platform – and potentially leave 3DS behind.

LETTER OF THE MONTH

Cheri Reilly asks, is the 3DS on its way out?

I'm writing in to ask what's happening with the Nintendo 3DS, as I've noticed there aren't really any decent games coming up for it this year.

I'm just really hoping it's not dying out as I absolutely love my 3DS and have done so for many years! As much as I do love the Switch as well, I just sometimes feel it's a little bit too large for me to handle as a portable console, and it's just not as compact as a 3DS when I need to travel with it.

I also feel some games that are really suitable for the 3DS, would not have the same feeling on the Switch.

I would be gutted if it does go as it would be like losing a friend (for me anyway!), and I don't want to end up resenting the Switch for 'pushing' the 3DS out of the way.

Cheri Reilly, Facebook

Unfortunately, we don't have good news for you – we reckon the 3DS is indeed not long for this world. As you say, since the launch of Switch, releases for 3DS have slowed down, and recent first-party titles haven't been up to snuff (e.g. Kirby: Battle Royale, Mario Party: The Top 100). Nintendo hasn't come out and announced the end, and there are still some games coming to it this year and next, but it's clear the huge success of Switch has shifted the company's focus. And series such as Monster Hunter and Pokémon leaving the platform seems to seal 3DS' fate.

But hey, it had a good run, right? Seven years full of awesome games – not a bad lifespan for a console. Goodnight, sweet prince of handhelds… ■

Nintendo has announced that the next Pokémon game is coming to Switch, rather than 3DS.

WIN!

Got an opinion? Have even the barest grasp of words and how to put them together? The best letter bags a free mystery prize!*

*Don't forget to include your postal address and chosen gaming format!



CONTACT US

Email gamesmaster@futurenet.com

Twitter www.twitter.com/gamesmaster

Facebook www.facebook.com/officialgamesmaster

Web www.gamesradar.com/gamesmaster

Post GamesMaster, Future, Quay House, The Ambury, Bath, BA1 1AU, UK

Future proof?

I wanted to pick your brains and ask the people in the know (you!) when you think the next generation of consoles are going to come out? I've heard rumours that Sony have started to send out dev kits to software companies already… I think the earliest it will be is 2020 with the bookies' favourite being 2022.

Do you think it's too early for the next consoles, given that we've had mid-cycle upgrades already?

Sam Hamilton, email

Yeah, we've seen the rumour going round about PS5 dev kits, but we're pretty certain it's not true. We think you're probably right that 2020 seems like the earliest the next gen could launch, and we definitely wouldn't be surprised if it took as long as 2022.

It depends a lot, however, on how big a leap the next generation actually is. As you say, we've started seeing 'half-step' consoles such as PS4 Pro and Xbox One X – will Sony and Microsoft's next consoles represent another small jump up from there, or will it be the traditional hard generational divide? Hard to say.

A few queeries

After reading Sam's thoughtful article on queer representation in gaming in issue 329, I was prompted to think more deeply about the subject and raise some points and questions for consideration. Firstly, it's worth mentioning that as a straight, white male never have I thought I'd been discriminated against nor have I had any shortage of videogame characters to 'represent' me. But it is this concept of 'representation' that I'm hoping you can help explain to me.

Personally, I do not look to videogame characters, to 'represent' me but rather to engage with me. Be it through good writing, good performance, or good narrative, characters in entertainment will engage with me on an emotional level not because of their demographic but because of their story and their development. This is why I see the kiss shared between Ellie and Riley in The Last of Us: Left Behind DLC not as a use of homosexual imagery but as an effective story-telling technique that, regardless of the sexuality behind it, is the culmination of these two characters' arcs together.

What would be your response to this? Do you think sexuality in a character is an important factor in your ability to engage with them?

Alex Westwood, email

READER REVIEW

Charlie Ridgewell writes in with their verdict on **Ni No Kuni II: Revenant Kingdom**

The first Ni No Kuni is one of my favourite games, and I felt that its story was a complete one, so I went into the sequel with trepidation, and unfortunately, it wasn't unwarranted.

King Evan's journey to build a new kingdom after his old one is taken over isn't bad, but it's nowhere near as compelling as Oliver's in the first game thanks to some underwhelming characters. A key example of this is Roland, who is mysteriously teleported to the other world for unknown reasons, but very quickly adapts and after a while it's easy to forget where he actually came from.

Despite introducing players to the combat early, the game takes its time to unravel the rest of the gameplay, such as large-scale battles and kingdom management, which is impressively deep. But combat gets very repetitive and is too easy.

This is a decent game, entertaining and presented very well, but pales in comparison to the masterpiece original.

74%





"I DON'T LOOK TO VIDEOGAME CHARACTERS TO REPRESENT ME"

We're glad Sam's piece got you thinking, Alex! The thing is, representation will naturally not feel like a big deal when the majority of media is catering directly to your demographic. But try to put yourself in the shoes of someone who rarely sees their sexuality (or ethnicity, or gender, etc) represented, or only sees it used in a stereotypical or negative way. Imagine if there were no games starring straight, white male heroes – don't you think you would feel excluded?

Representation means different things to different people, and it can be a subtle and complex thing. As you say, you may not directly put yourself in the shoes of a game hero, or indeed you may find yourself empathising very strongly with a character who is very different from you. But trust us when we say that, for many of those from marginalised or minority groups, it is indeed extremely meaningful to see characters like themselves, and stories told from a perspective similar to theirs, in the media they love.

Dead end

Here's a question for the GM guys: what was the most unexpected game over you have ever had? For me, it was being brutally beat down by a Final Fantasy boss who went from hitting 300 damage to 7777 in a split second, then discovering I hadn't saved in ages. It was the moment I discovered the Materia Keeper in FF7 could be in All Sevens condition.
Jamie Sergison, Facebook

We posed this question to editor Robin and he just retreated into a corner muttering about Persona 4 and 5's instant kill spells…

The Daft Knight

Is it just me or are terrible games somehow addictive? The reason I ask this is because I have an original Xbox at home with a number of games. However, on the odd occasion I play it the only game I really play is 2003's Batman: Dark Tomorrow. A game filled with awful controls, glitches, graphics, and story, but it is because of those reasons I play it because of it being so hilariously bad. Please tell me I'm not the only one.
Daniel Climo, Facebook

Here at GM we love a so-bad-it's-good movie (Hell Comes To Frogtown is a team favourite…) but weirdly we don't really feel the same about any games. We'll throw it out to the readers – does anyone else have a soft spot for a particularly rubbish title? ■



OFF THE CHART!

The hot topics you've been gabbing about

- **27%** Your favourite DLCs
- **26%** How many games do you buy in a year?
- **20%** Nintendo Labo chat
- **14%** The best strategy games ever
- **13%** Your gaming collections

YOUR TOP 5 MOST WANTED

The most exciting upcoming games, as voted for by you on our Facebook and Twitter pages



1

SPIDER-MAN

Format PS4 **ETA** 7 September

For the first time in months, Red Dead has been punted off the top spot! Congrats to our boy in red and blue – now officially cooler than the Wild West.



2

RED DEAD REDEMPTION 2

Format PS4, XO **ETA** 26 October

GTA V was recently revealed to be the most profitable entertainment product of all time by MarketWatch – we wouldn't be surprised if RDR2 does even better.



3

DETROIT: BECOME HUMAN

Format PS4 **ETA** 25 May

Last month's demo seems to have gotten plenty of GM readers on side. We're planning to include our full review in next issue, on sale 14 June.



4

DREAMS

Format PS4 **ETA** Winter

As it stands, we can't decide if we're excited or terrified by the prospect of finding out what the gaming public dreams about…



5

CYBERPUNK 2077

Format TBC **ETA** Summer 2019

In our day, all you needed to be a punk was a couple of safety pins and a dodgy haircut. Now it's all robot limbs and USB ports in your neck. Ridiculous.

YOU LOVE GAMES

Cool stuff and videogame culture



This month, Sam Hamilton has taught us that if you put enough controllers and handhelds together, you get a mean left hook…



Steven Meng unearthed this collection of classic GMs at his parents' house – buried treasure!

SCREENSHOT SHOWCASE

This month's best snaps



QUBE: Director's Cut
Barrie Rimmer, Facebook



Guardians Of The Galaxy: The Telltale Series
Sarah Barber, Facebook



Far Cry 5
Eamon Sherry, @eamon_sherry



Uncharted: The Lost Legacy
That Glasgow Gamer, @ThatGlasgwGamer



Mass Effect Andromeda
Daniel Climo, Facebook



Far Cry 5
Sammy, @SakorrOfficial



Monster Hunter World
Sammy, @SakorrOfficial

SOCIAL GROUSING

Wisdom and weirdness from our bustling social media channels



The Witcher 3 DLCs arguably are better than most other games just on their own!

Garalar, @GaryBlower



God Of War is the best game of this generation.

John Mitchell, Facebook



I have so many games that I haven't played yet, but still think I don't buy enough.

James Champion, Facebook

MANIAC OF THE MONTH!



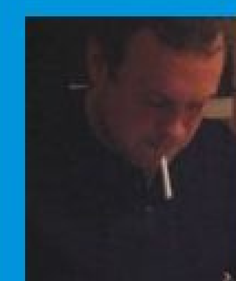
Thanks to Nintendo I've realised how much cash there is in cardboard. Does anybody want to buy a cornflakes box?

Daniel Reid, Facebook



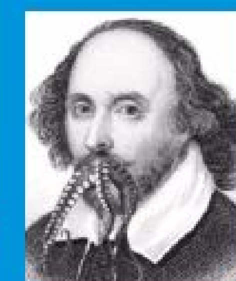
I love Nintendo, and hope Labo does well, but I have no interest. Get back to work on holograms. That, I'll buy day one!

Matt Butler, Facebook



I've never grown so attached to a videogame character as I did to my squad members in XCOM.

Joe Harris, Facebook



Chaos for the ZX Spectrum is the best strategy game ever. How many others let you murder someone with an imaginary dragon or use a magical fungus to doom everyone on the battlefield?

Chris MC, @DaftRonson





GT75 Titan

TOTAL DOMINANCE

Equipped with 8th GEN. INTEL® CORE™ i9 PROCESSOR







| WINDOWS 10 HOME / WINDOWS 10 PRO | GEFORCE® GTX 1080 / 1070 SLI / 1070 GRAPHICS |

WHERE TO BUY

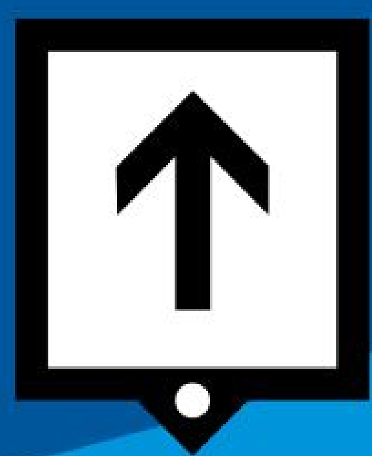
MSI.COM

SCAN Scan Computers www.scan.co.uk 0871 472 4747

box.co.uk Box Ltd www.box.co.uk 0121 202 0030

Currys PC World Currys PC World www.pcworld.co.uk 0344 561 0000

*Performance result may vary on different configuration. Product features and specifications may vary by model.



GM Upfront

Info / Games / Opinion

Overwatch's loot boxes are purely cosmetic – but does that actually make them any less predatory?

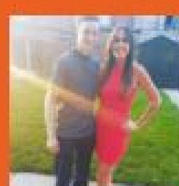






The Burning Question 

What do you think of videogame lootboxes?



If they carry on with them it'll be a massive part of killing gaming.
Jordan Carroll, @Jordinho88



They're fine as long as the loot is purely cosmetic and can be earned as well as bought.
Alex Eagles, @Cynibot

Visit www.facebook.com/officialgamesmaster and www.twitter.com/gamesmaster to take part in next issue's burning questions.













BOX CLEVER

A few examples of loot boxes and their shiny contents



Star Cards, which impact on gameplay, no longer come in Battlefront II boxes; only credits and cosmetics.



Overwatch regularly offers themed boxes, with a chance of rare skins unattainable after the promo period.



The latest Call Of Duty forces you to open its loot boxes publicly, the contents visible to any nearby players.



LOOTS OF TROUBLE

Two countries rule that loot boxes must change



Is buying a loot box the same as gambling? This deceptively simple question revolves around two facts: first, you never know *exactly* what you're getting in exchange for your money; and second, whatever you do get has no intrinsic value outside of the game world. Publishers have relied on the latter fact to skirt gambling regulation. Examine loot box systems carefully, and you'll see that contents can never be bought directly with real money; only with in-game currency that can be bought or – importantly – slowly earned for free. Now, that's no longer enough.

Last month, Belgium and the Netherlands ruled that some examples of loot boxes were in violation of their gambling laws, and change must be implemented. The director of the Belgian Gambling Commission, Peter Naessens, said that players of FIFA 18, Overwatch, and Counter-Strike: Global Offensive are "tempted and misled". The investigation was instigated last year following the notorious Battlefront II loot box controversy (though interestingly, that particular game was found to *not* be violating Belgian gambling laws).

At time of writing, the Netherlands Gaming Authority has not revealed which four games were found to be using illegal loot box systems in its territory. (If changes are not implemented, they will then be named and shamed.) It has, however, specified that any loot boxes offering tradable items are in violation. Dutch news site NOS points out that this could mean FIFA 18, DOTA 2, PlayerUnknown's Battlegrounds, and Rocket League.

The ruling in the Netherlands is likely to be the one that will concern the industry the most. The NGA draws direct comparisons with gambling games and machines in conversation with NOS, noting how loot boxes draw out the opening with lights, effects, and sounds. In a practical sense, however, the unnamed publishers only have until 20 June to remove or change the loot boxes. If they fail to do so, further action could include banning the affected games, issuing fines, and/or even prison sentences. The fact that the NGA has made clear it wants to "work together and act together" with the rest of the EU will send alarm bells ringing in certain boardrooms.

Exactly how, when, and where the recent rulings will effect change is currently unclear, but it's now obvious that many systems are untenable as they stand. Make no mistake, change *is* coming; we saw loot box systems changed and removed even before the legal issues arose. EA's Star Wars: Battlefront II is the most obvious example, a huge update eventually issued to completely rewrite how online unlocks work. And it's not the only game where changes have been made. In an April blog post, Monolith announced that a 17 July update will completely remove all traces of loot boxes and microtransactions from Middle-earth: Shadow Of War.

"THE UNNAMED PUBLISHERS ONLY HAVE UNTIL 20 JUNE TO REMOVE OR CHANGE THE LOOT BOXES"

EA is likely to lead the way here, especially as Europe is vital to the success of the enormously profitable FIFA Ultimate Team. Microtransactions are here to stay but loot boxes, at least, are likely to see some significant changes in the next six months. ■

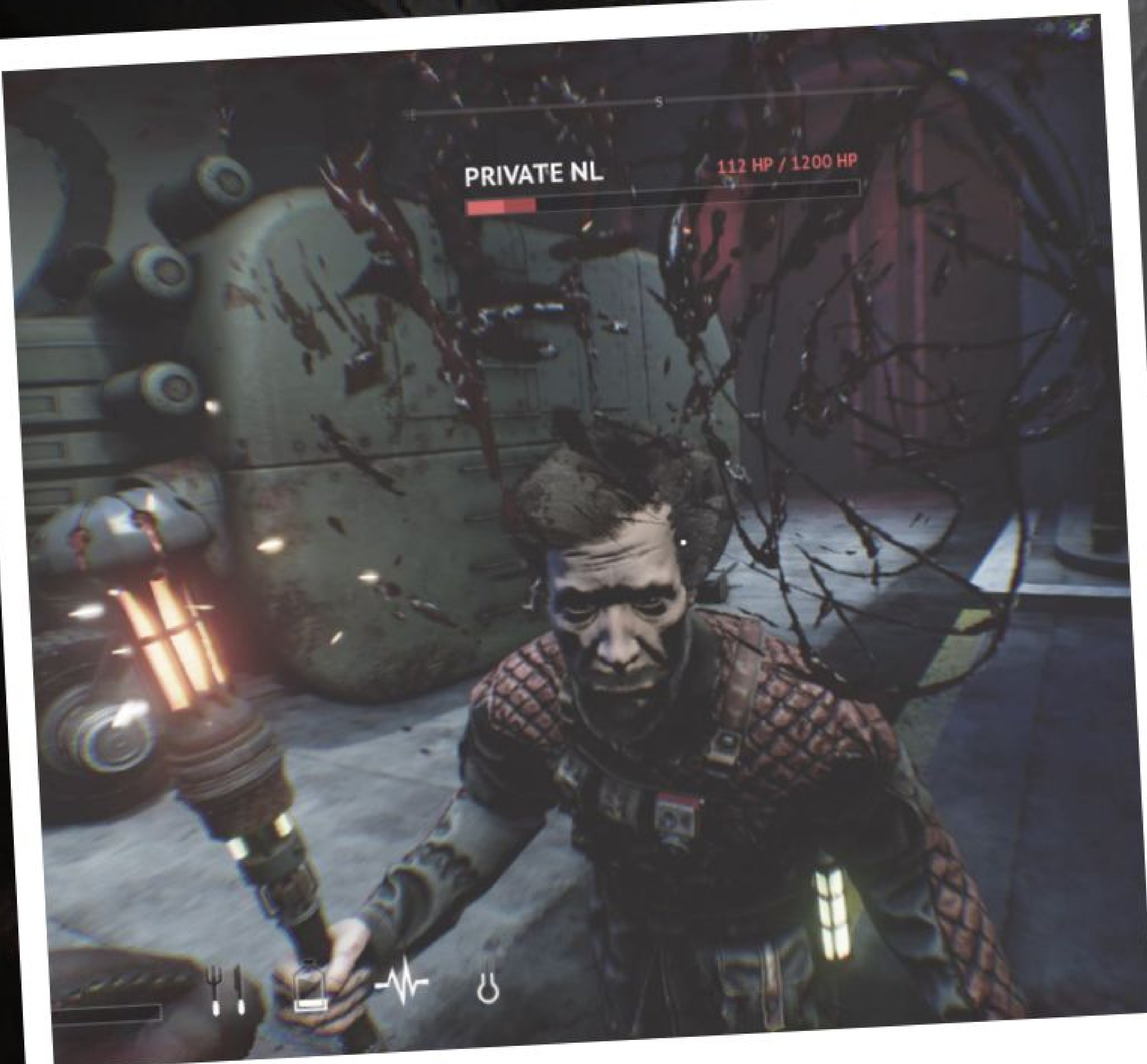


HURLEY ACCESS
ADVENTURES IN EARLY ACCESS
With your host... ★★LEON HURLEY★★

JE SUIS DÉS-OH MY GOD, WHAT IS THAT?!

Battling hunger and ghosts in Desolate's post-apocalyptic world

There are scary survival horror games and then there is Desolate, a Stalker-inspired co-op adventure about trying not to die on a contaminated Russian island populated with mutant animals, frenzied scavengers, and creepy child ghosts. It's tough, scary, and definitely not for the fainthearted. God knows why we're sending Leon in to check it out then...



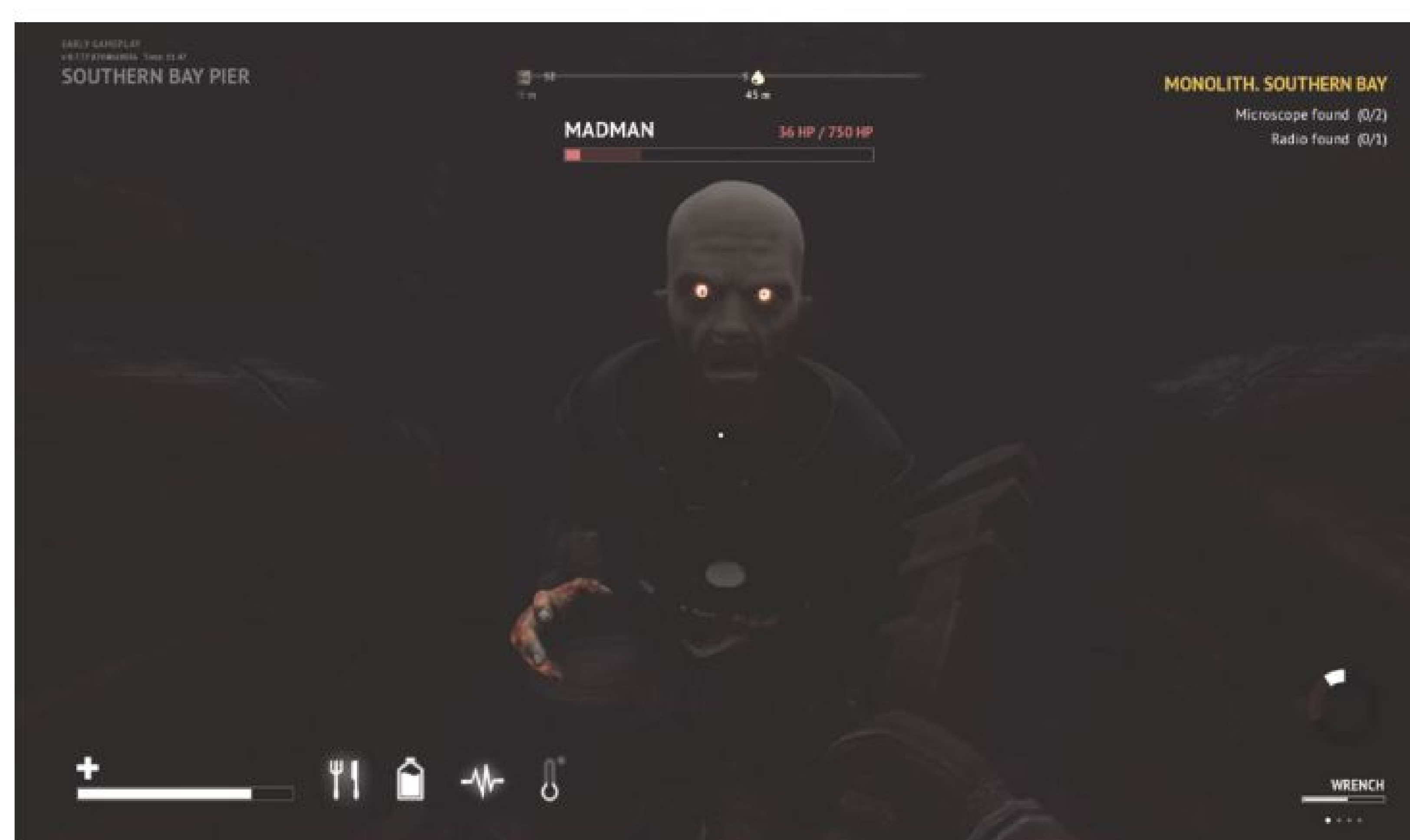
0 MINUTES

If Desolate's tutorial is anything to go by this is a game about finding people who look like a slightly worried Gary Oldman and beating them to death with a crowbar. Well, that seems to be the gist of things so far. Within minutes I'm two Gary Oldmen down and I've learned the finer points of hitting people with metal sticks, crawling through gaps, and picking stuff up. It's also clear that whoever made the trailers did an amazing job of making this look way better than it actually does. It's not terrible, just a bit 'made with Unity' in real life, rather than the 'Metro Exodus at nuclear PC' appearance of the official gameplay – and I'm apparently playing on an 'epic' setting. The voice acting is also a little 'Greg from the canteen says he'll have a go' as well. It's atmospheric, though, and is fun so far, so all those Garies haven't died in vain.



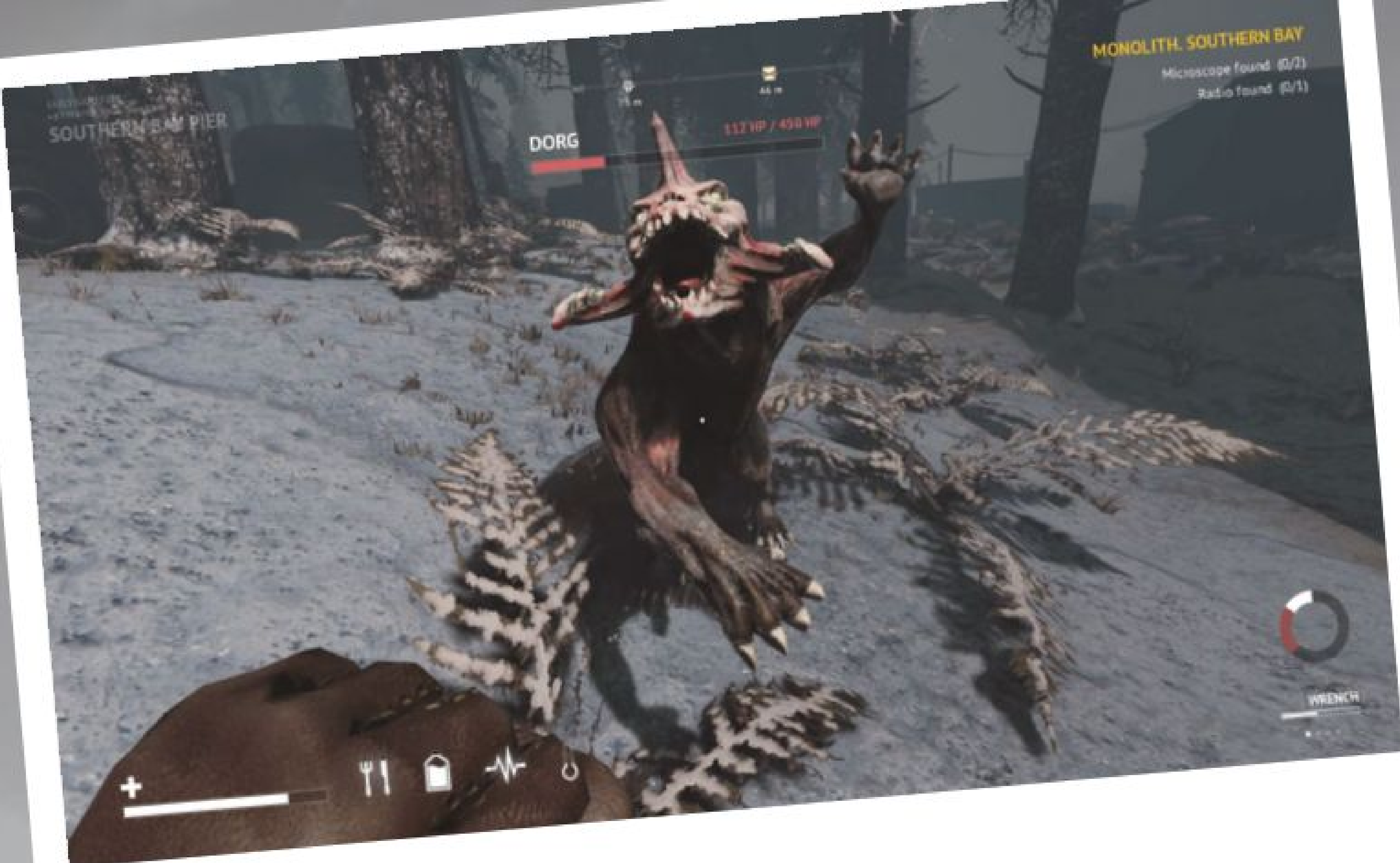
15 MINUTES

With the tutorial over I'm released into the game's full world, and from the moment it starts it's clear the people behind it love Stalker, Metro, System Shock, and Bioshock. There's the opulent, Rapture-esque apartment you start life in, little faces that pop up when you talk to people on a radio, and a toxic post-apocalyptic wasteland full of bug-eyed dog monsters to explore, plus survivors who long ago wrapped up their sanity and posted it home. There are also some spooky things going on with strange noises, or ghosts filling in backstories about vending machine pillaging and cannibalism. There's even a creepy mannequin which, *of course*, is always facing you when you turn around to check. It's going to get so much worse though. I just don't know it yet. This is just future me giving present me a warning. Wait, what?



30 MINUTES

The main thing at the moment is collecting things. I don't know what's valuable yet so my pockets are full of broken scissors, metal, radios, and just about anything that will fit in them. I've a loose objective of getting an old workbench working so I'm darting between buildings, avoiding scary noises in the trees, while looking for a transformer and a toaster. As I do I hear a child crying and then a tiny voice saying 'Play with me'. There aren't enough nopes in the world right now. I'm in the dark and it's just horrible noises everywhere – snuffling, growls, and howls in every shadow. The next ten minutes are me just running away from sounds I don't want to know any more about. At one point, while I'm hiding in a warehouse from a glowing-eyed madman, a child's voice whispers in my ear: "One, two, found you". NooooOO*OOPE*.



45 MINUTES

Things don't get much better in the daylight because now I can see what's out there. Like the Dorg, which isn't a typo. It's what you'd get if you made a dog but added an extra jaw and decided the face was better without any skin. I'm supposed to be getting a radio tower working, and I've been joined by a random online player as I thought opening up the co-op options might help. It kind of does, because the other player has a gun and doesn't mind attacking things, but he also takes all the supplies, says nothing, and never revives me when I die. But considering all I've got is a pocket full of junk and a stick, beggars can't be choosers. Between us we fix the radio tower and discover there's a base we can use if we can find a token to gain entry.



1 HOUR

It's not long before I discover just how scary this game can get. This world is full of hanging bodies, shadows that run across doorways, and distant roaring noises. But nothing prepares me for the... let's call her 'The Girl'. She just appears, floating in front of you with a deafening stab of broken violins, then disappears before you've had a chance to register what's happening. I dread to think what the other player thinks of me as I scream my favourite bad words at deafening volume. It's the lowest of all the scares – just a sudden, loud noise – but it works. And it keeps happening. My nerves are shredded and I'm actually looking forward to Dorgs. They're adorable by comparison.



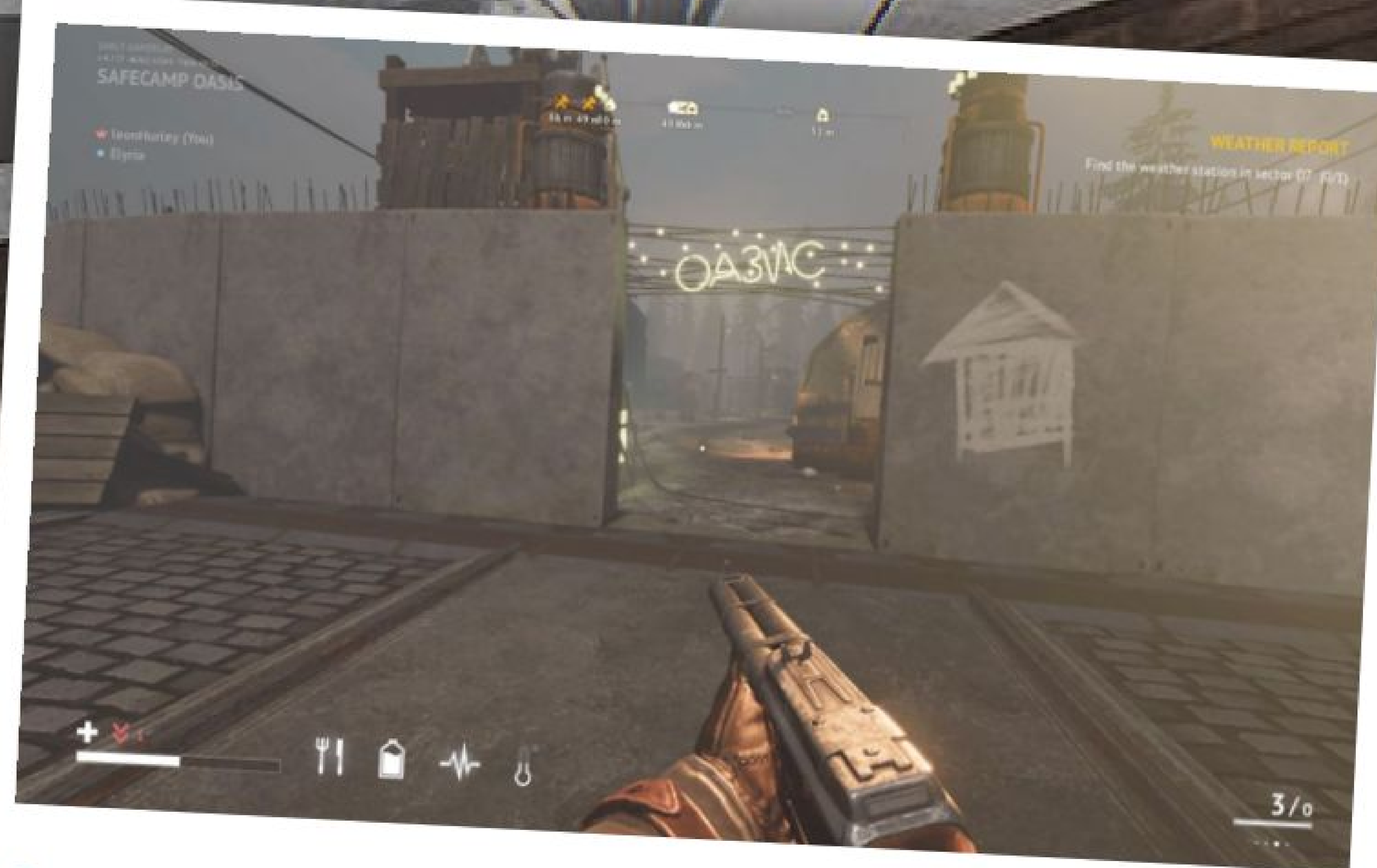
1 HOUR 30 MINUTES

A lot's happened in the last 30 minutes. I've lost my buddy but I've found the base, stocked up, and crafted loads. I've got a gun, medi packs, and a mission to kill a Wanogah. I have no idea what that is. I'm hoping for some kind of hamster. This game is *tough*. To get to this point I've run away from any noise and hoarded *everything*. Which means I have six bullets and three healing things. Compared to how I started I'm living like a king. A king who's spent 30 minutes crawling through the forest with his torch turned off because he's so scared of meeting anything. At one point The Girl appears in a building and I jump so hard I fire one of my bullets into the ceiling.



1 HOUR 45 MINUTES

It's taken me ages but I've finally found the Wanogah. It is not a hamster, it's some sort of mutated naked lady thing spitting poison. It took a while, partly because I was so cautious and partly because I decided to wait until daybreak until I started looking in the buildings it was meant to be in. Obviously it was in the locked one so I wander off to find a key card (in an abandoned radar base full of murderers), find it, kill the thing, and gather whatever body part it is that gets me the reward. I'm supposed to drop it in a delivery tube but the map is so big, and my route so winding that there aren't any nearby, so I decide to head back to the base. Just as soon as I can get out, past all the bad people with axes I didn't kill on the way in.



2 HOURS

The journey back is even more treacherous because I've run out of all my supplies. I'm starving, but also out of healing stuff so any attempts to scavenge are extra risky. I also really, really need the toilet in the real world. The only problem is that because it's online, there's no pause and my bladder is so full I'm worried another appearance of The Girl will cause more problems than accidentally firing my gun. My only option is to find somewhere quiet to hide and then run to the loo as fast as possible hoping nothing attacks me. They don't and I make it back to the base with my actual bladder as empty as my videogame stomach – my health chipping away as I drop off the Wanogah bits and claim my reward. That's enough stress for tonight...

NIGHT TERRORS

It's clunky in places but Desolate has plenty to offer if you fancy a survival challenge with scares along the way. True, some of them – such as The Girl – are cheap shots but still *very* effective. Aside from her, the feeling is of gnawing fear. Supplies are sparse, enemies are dangerous, and death can cost you everything if you can't recover your gear fast enough. This is not to be played casually, especially given the lack of pause from the online side of things. Currently it's rough in a few places but rewarding, if slightly wobbly, combat and objective markers won't put you off. If it they do however, then watch for future updates because this definitely one to have on your list.





"How many excellent indies such as Celeste are falling through the net?"

Ever-increasing numbers of releases and poor digital curation continue to leave great indies lost by the wayside, argues Aaron Potter

Not to sound like too much of a killjoy, but 'a good problem to have' is still inherently a problem. Such is the issue we find ourselves facing whenever we turn our eye to the big companies' digital distribution services.

More games than ever before continue to be published on a weekly basis across PSN, the Switch eShop, and Xbox Live, yet what good is such an influx of things to play when the titles themselves are given so little room to breathe? Steam alone released over 7,000 games throughout 2017 – that's almost as many as were released between 2005 and 2015 in total!

There are exceptions, of course. Some indies, such as Celeste, strike lucky, finding success thanks to widespread critical acclaim and gradual word of mouth. It leads me to wonder, how many more Celestes are falling through the net? It's clear that more can be done with regards to curation, despite existing efforts. While the constant stream of headlines such as "Super Meat Boy's day-one Switch sales almost as high as Its 360 debut" and "Switch Monster Boy pre-orders are outdoing PS4 by 10 to 1" appear to be good news, to me, this only highlights the discoverability problems present elsewhere.

> "STEAM ALONE RELEASED OVER 7,000 GAMES THROUGHOUT 2017"

I dream of indie

Surprisingly, it's actually Nintendo which is the one taking concerted efforts to ensure the audience find great games such as Splasher, Slime-San, and Battle Chef Brigade, no doubt inspired by the excitement still surrounding the console even over a year on. With such a huge swathe of games each week, carefully planned curation strategies are quickly becoming a necessity. It breaks my heart when a game such as the clearly unfinished Life Of Black Tiger has its own 'highlighted PlayStation' trailer, when all that marketing power could've been dedicated to promoting an exciting new property that is completed, playable, and something people will enjoy, and not regret spending their money on.

All of us have only so much time in the day to play games – and school, work, parenthood and other responsibilities all mean that time is extra precious. Unfortunately, much of the onus now falls directly on us to be more informed when browsing digital store shelves. In some ways this is a good thing. After all, it's hoped that such dedication will lead to the cream of the crop rising to the top. But with so much unworthy nonsense filling out the gaps in between potential greatness, Valve, Sony, and Microsoft can't afford to take their feet off the pedal. They need to help us cherry-pick.

2018 continues to be an exciting time for indies. Small studios creating games containing pioneering stories, mechanics, and concepts that would never gain the backing of a big publisher can now get them directly into the hands of players, without need for physical distribution. Let's just hope those same big publishers can at least give them their time in the sun. ■

STATS MAGIC The gaming month in facts and figures

1m+
Co-op adventure A Way Out has sold over one million copies, despite mixed reviews – that's twice as many as EA expected to shift.

£660k
Three Korean games companies were fined this much combined for deceptive loot box practices.

9
Less than a year after release, this was the peak number of players for LawBreakers in April – not even enough for one match.

£75
The price of the new top-tier Leaf Ticket bundle in Animal Crossing: Pocket Camp. Tom Nook must be *raking* it in.





"The biggest games should start taking more stylistic risks to stand out"

God of War's innovative single-shot approach sets a cinematic example for other triple-A titles to follow, argues Chris Schilling

You're probably aware by now that God Of War's story takes place within a single, continuous shot. The camera never cuts away: it mostly stays close to Kratos's right shoulder, occasionally gliding around to take in different perspectives, but it won't ever jump to a different position. It commits to this idea fully, echoing the cinematic feats of Alexander Sokurov's Russian Ark and Sebastian Schipper's dazzling thriller Victoria. Only when the player dips into menus to fast-travel and equip new gear is the spell broken.

In truth, it's the kind of thing you might not notice if you weren't already aware of it – most third-person games have long periods where the camera is entirely under the player's guidance, and it's only when the developer wrenches control that you see any cuts. But once you know about it, you can't help but admire the craft. It gives the game a rare sense of intimacy: you feel closer to Kratos than before because the camera never leaves his side, and therefore neither do you. And while you're aware that an in-game camera can't be restricted by physical objects, consider the technical issues that total seamlessness would present. Sure, walking along the branches of the World Tree is basically an interactive loading screen, and there's a reason there are so many giant doors – and why it takes a good few seconds for Kratos to prise them open – but unless you die, there are never any clear breaks in the action.

Norsin' around

You can see why other developers haven't attempted to do it to date, then. But it makes a striking creative difference in a game that otherwise conforms to the now typical levelling, upgrade, and loot systems we see in most single-player triple-A games. As good as God Of War is, that template is starting to feel a little familiar. If the biggest games are going to continue to lean on old, tried-and-tested tricks, they might need to start taking more stylistic risks to stand out.

So let's see more experiments with perspectives and cinematic techniques, more things that make us see differently. Indie games such as Thirty Flights Of Loving, Virginia, and recent horror Paratopic all use jump-cuts and smash-cuts to great effect; there's no reason why blockbuster games couldn't do the same. And though The Evil Within's letterboxed presentation wasn't to everyone's taste – and was seemingly partly born of engine limitations – it gave the game a distinctive visual signature that its full-screen sequel lacked. Could we potentially see a game in the near future that uses the Academy ratio to provide a more contained, claustrophobic framing? Well, why not? As difficult as it must have been to get the single-shot approach right in God Of War, it would be a pity if Sony Santa Monica's remarkable achievement didn't challenge more triple-A developers to take similar chances. ■

> "AS GOOD AS GOD OF WAR IS, THAT TEMPLATE IS STARTING TO FEEL A LITTLE FAMILIAR"

GM MOST WANTED

What's most tickling the team's fancy this month





ROBIN'S PICK

Shadow Of The Tomb Raider

The rebooted trilogy is yet to wow me when it comes to story or characters, but I love exploring its wilderness environments. Rise in particular struck a sweet spot for me between cinematic action and grounded survival, and I'm hoping Shadow can do the same. And with its vibrant jungle and Mayan ruins, it feels like the most 'classic' setting yet, harkening back pleasingly to the original games. Hey, maybe it'll even have a T. rex!

PS4, XO, PC – 14 September



SAM'S PICK

Below

Ever since my hands-on I've been dying to return to that mysterious island, to explore further and figure out just what it's all about. I've been excited about this one for a while but expectations have been exceeded handsomely, and Below is sure to blow everyone away when it finally releases. Everything about it is enchanting – though most of all I'm keen to hear Jim Guthrie's soundtrack complete and uninterrupted.

PC – Winter



Labo is definitely something you'll want to share, and will be perfect for parents to make with their kids.

CARD TIMES AHEAD

Everything you need to know about Nintendo Labo

While any other company would be more than happy to rest after launching something as successful as Switch, Nintendo is only getting started. Like a proud parent, he company clearly sees limitless potential in its bouncing baby console. Low-tech cardboard toys that interact with your high-tech games machine? That's a leap nobody could have predicted. With Labo, though, Nintendo proves it understands Switch better than anybody.

As a concept, Labo is simple enough. You buy sheets of cardboard with pieces that can be pressed out and folded into devices that your JoyCon attach to, and the constructions can interact with games on your Switch.

There are two packs in the initial release. First is the Variety Pack, which comes with a range of cardboard toys. There's an RC car, a fishing rod, a little house, a piano, and a racing bike. The pack comes with a set of instructions that display on your Switch. You control the speed of this easy-to-follow guide, and it will take you through putting the toys together, step by step. Each Labo is incredibly easy to construct, with smaller ones taking just a few minutes to put together. Ones with more moving parts – such as the piano – are bigger projects that may take an hour so, but stay simple throughout. Once it's all assembled, you attach the JoyCon so it can interact with the appropriate games. The rod, for instance, comes with a fishing game, which has you throwing the line and reeling in your catch.

The other option available at launch is the Robot Kit, which you use to build an elaborate robot suit made of pulleys that allows you to play a fun mech game with your whole body. That's right, you can actually *be* a robot. Albeit one that can't go out in the rain.

Tears before bedtime

What's most immediately impressive is the construction of all these toys. The imagination Nintendo has applied to cardboard, and the ingenious ways it's made things so easy to fold together, is truly fantastic. There's something quite exciting in simply seeing how it all fits together and works. It's a bit of a shame, then, that the quality of the cardboard isn't too great. In our time with Labo we've nearly torn off small tabs and corners many times. Left sitting around the house or in the hands of young children we wouldn't expect Labo to survive more than a few days of use. Improvised repairs might keep them going a little longer, but overall there's a

"THE IMAGINATION AND INGENUITY NINTENDO HAS APPLIED TO CARDBOARD IS TRULY FANTASTIC"

CARDBOARD CUSTOMISATION

Making your Labo toy unique

One lovely thing about Labo is that it's simply cardboard, which of course means you can draw on it or stick things onto it or cut shapes out of it. This stuff is *yours* and Nintendo is fully encouraging you to make your own mark on each Labo toy. The company's even left extra room in toys such as the Piano, where users can wrap keys in sticky tape to get the feel just right if they want. We've already seen many colourful variations on the RC car, and children are certainly going to have a time personalising their cardboard toy. Here's our effort: Sandy The Sad Car. What?



real longevity problem, which does make that price tag seem pretty steep.

The games themselves aren't as solid as we'd have liked, either. They're all very well put together but none of them will keep you entertained for more than a session or two. Young kids may become enthralled, but we imagine older children, used to playing expansive titles such as Minecraft, will find Labo's initial release games rather dull.

Paper view

The real longevity of Labo will be down to the Toy-con Garage. Here users can program new functions into the Labo toys or JoyCon: you could turn a JoyCon into a sensor-tripped alarm, or allow your RC car to battle other toys for points. The interface is simple, broken down into an easy input-equals-output system. It's basic scripting that's approachable for kids. Making your own games is what will sustain Labo, and Nintendo has provided great tools to meet player imagination. Whether adults or children are willing to engage with it is what will determine how long Labo lasts in the wild. There's plenty to be impressed by, but to play with, it can feel somewhat two-dimensional. Here's hoping fans can transform it into something really special. ■



The big robot Labo is truly the most impressive in terms of how it's put together. And who hasn't wanted to be a giant mecha-person at some point?







If you fancy yourself as a composer, the piano Labo will let you record your own music – or you can just plink around on it to annoy your neighbours.



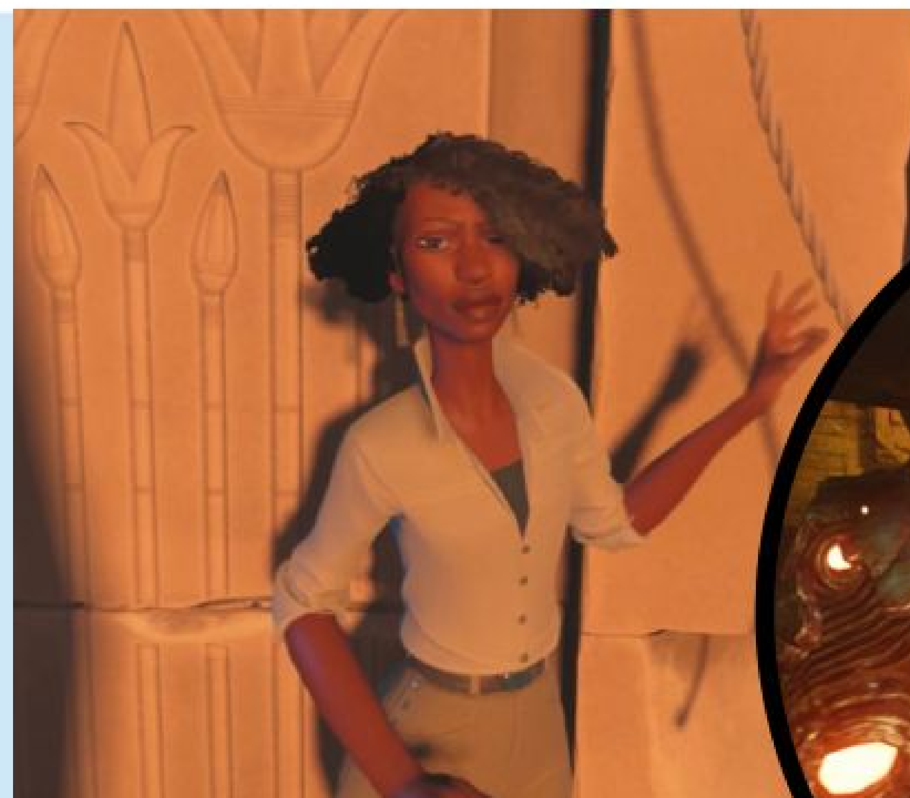
SCROLLS BACK

The Elder Scrolls 3: Morrowind is one of a number of Xbox games now playable on Xbox One thanks to the latest update to the console's backwards compatibility. If you've still got the original disc, or buy the digital version of the game from the online store, you can enjoy the RPG classic. MX Unleashed and Destroy All Humans! are among the other Xbox titles coming to the current console.



WOLFENSWITCH

Bethesda's Wolfenstein II will be launching on Switch on 29 June – and Nintendo's colourful portable is getting the full, uncensored version, not some trimmed-back or softened edition, so you'll be able to punch Nazis and defeat Hitler on your daily commute.



HAPPY CAMPO

Valve's added some new development talent to its hallowed halls, with the acquisition of Firewatch developer Campo Santo. Don't worry, this won't affect development of the studio's latest project, In The Valley Of The Gods – the release of that should still go as planned.



CERTAIN DOOM

Variety has reported we're getting a new Doom film! But as it's being handled by Universal 1440 Entertainment, it's highly unlikely to get cinema distribution – direct to DVD or a digital service is the most probable. But it can't be worse than 2005's awful effort, which *was* shown in cinemas, and rightly bombed. Fingers crossed for this one…

Topping the leaderboard this issue

YOU WIN



YOU LOSE



No, we don't want to continue thanks



BECOME SUE-MAN

As though the intense drama in its forthcoming game isn't enough, developer Quantic Dream is suing two French media outlets, newspaper Le Monde and website Mediapart, Kotaku has confirmed. They, along with another website Canard PC, collaborated on a story and published articles alleging an unhealthy culture at Quantic Dream's Paris studio, which the developer firmly denies.



DONKEY WRONG

Official ranking organisation Twin Galaxies has deleted Donkey Kong champ Billy Mitchell's scores from its records after an examination of recordings of his runs concluded in some cases an emulator, not an official arcade machine, was used. Guinness World Records has stricken his name from its books too. Mitchell denies any wrongdoing, and claims he'll be proving his innocence soon.



FINAL FIGHT

After just five months Capcom has cancelled Puzzle Fighter, and the game will be removed from app stores on 1 July, with servers closing on 31 July. The free-to-download mobile puzzler sees you smashing gems using heroes from Capcom's roster across levels from some of the studio's most famous games. The dev team, Capcom Game Studio Vancouver, will now focus on the Dead Rising series instead.

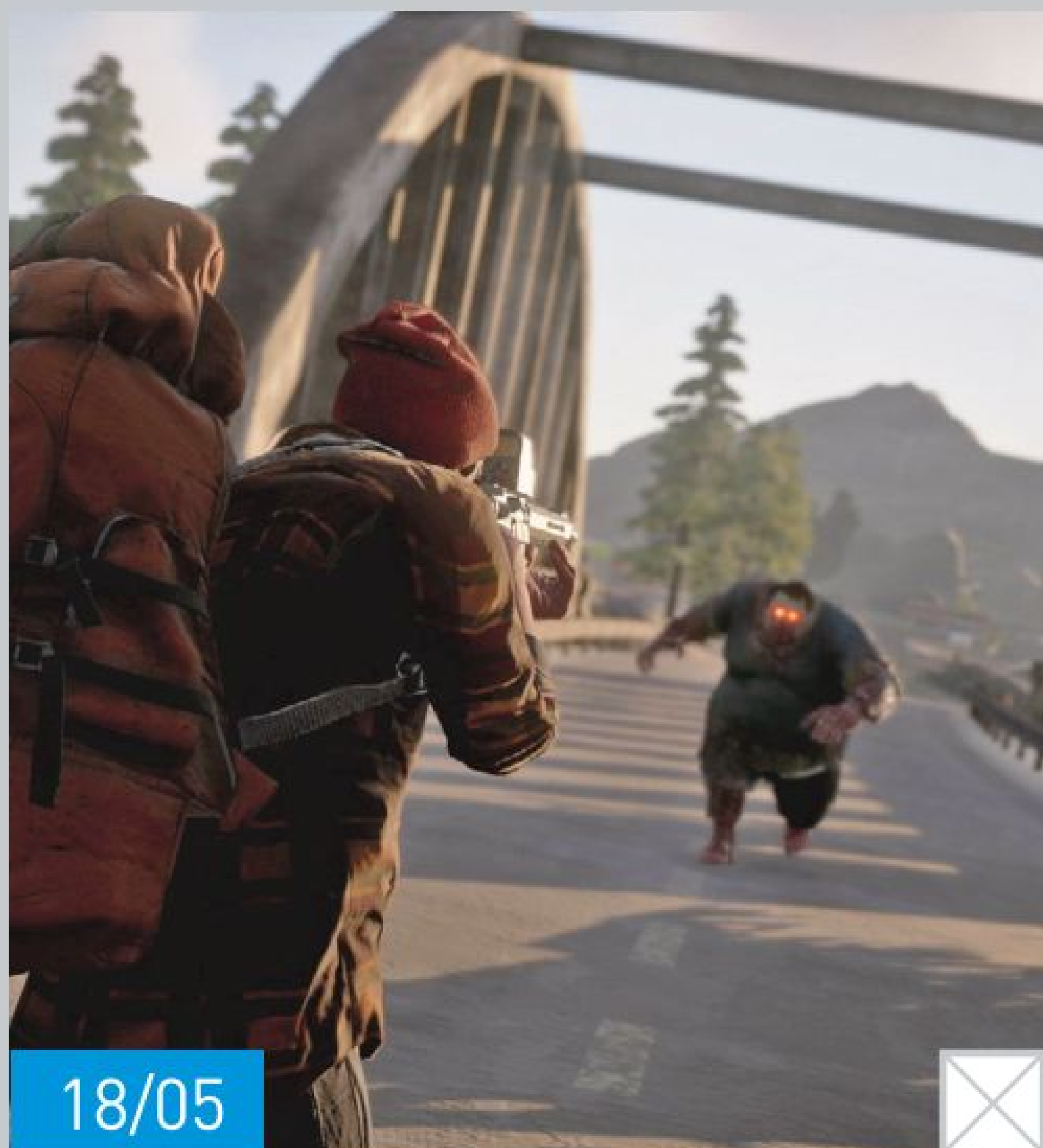


BRODE TRIP

Ben Brode has announced he's leaving Blizzard after 15 years with the company. He's spent most of the past decade working on Hearthstone, and as the game's public face is popular with the community. He assured fans that "the game is in the best possible hands." And as he's starting a new company that will "probably make games", we look forward to seeing what he'll come up with next.

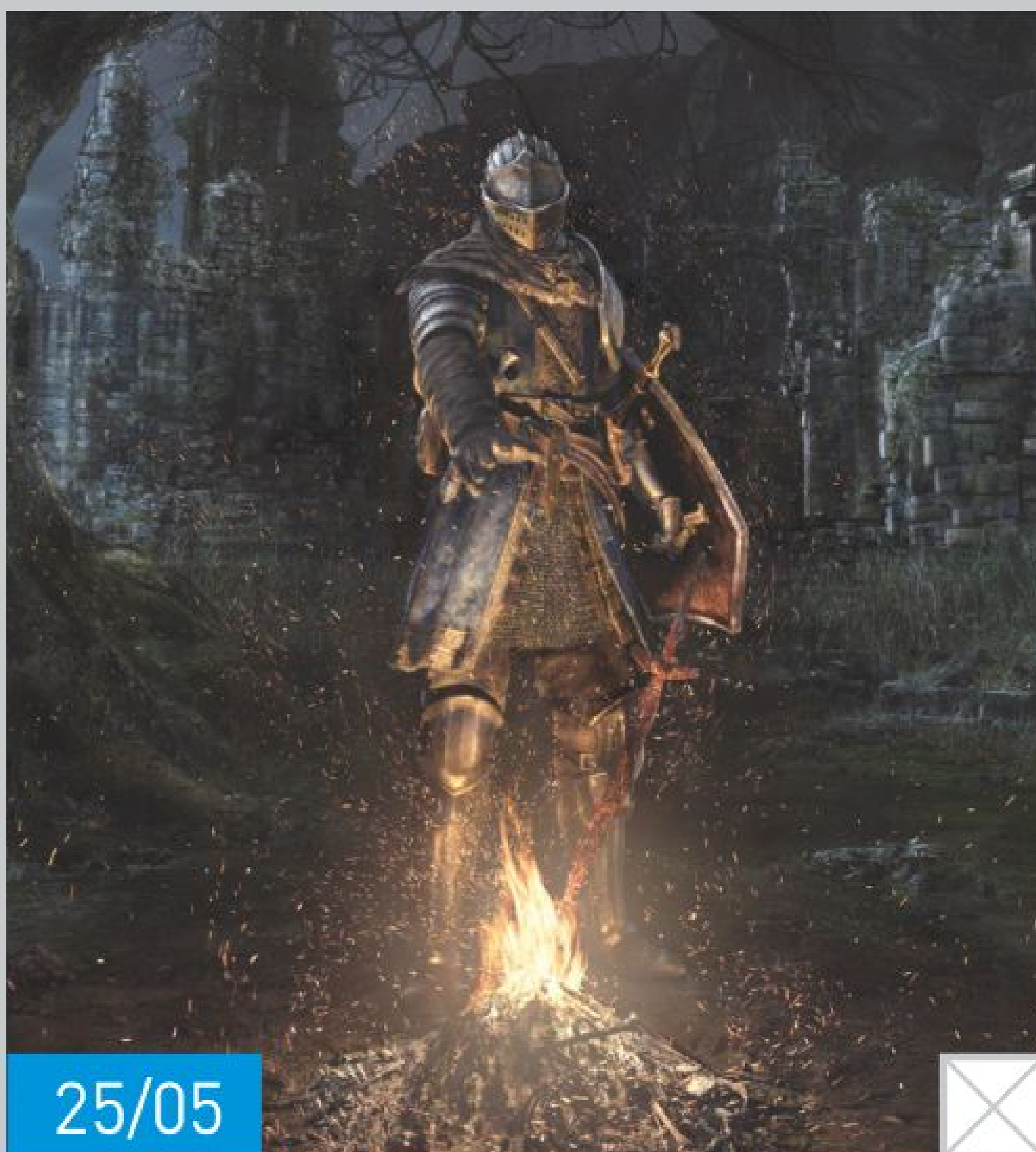
THE GM TO DO LIST

Crucial dates for your gaming diary. If you only do one thing this month, eat, but otherwise make a note of these events...


18/05

DEAD GOOD

State Of Decay 2 trudges on to Xbox One and PC today, with an army of zombies in tow.


25/05

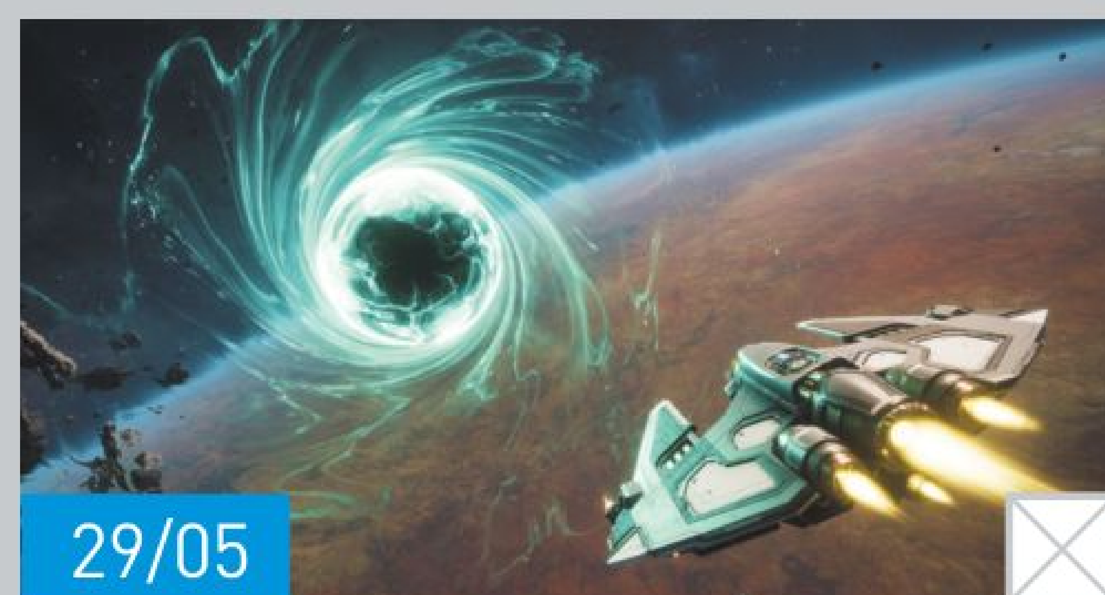
(BON)FIRESTARTER

Wakey wakey undead! It's time to die all over again in Dark Souls Remastered, out today.


25/05

FREEDOM OF CHOICE

Get ready to join the android uprising, as Detroit: Become Human hits shops.


29/05

BLAST OFF!

Helmets on, engines started, and blasters at the ready – Everspace releases on PS4.


05/06

SUMMER'S SET

Take a load off in the Elvish isles – The Elder Scrolls Online: Summerset is out on console.




12/06

CINCO DE DINO

Jurassic World Evolution opens the park doors on PC, PS4, and Xbox One today.


12/06

HYPE O'CLOCK

E3 is back! Clear your schedules and get ready for all the reveals coming out of LA.


14/06

POWER PLAY

Grab yourself another superpowered issue of GamesMaster – GM331 is on shelves today!

INCOMING

Six big releases headed to a format near you...

01


Mario Tennis Aces
Format Switch
Out 22 June

02


New Gundam Breaker
Format PS4, PC
Out 22 June

03


The Crew 2
Format PS4, XO
Out 29 June

04


Crackdown 3
Format XO
Out 30 June

05

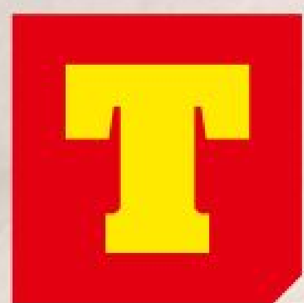

Crash Bandicoot N. Sane Trilogy
Format PC, Switch, XO
Out 10 July

06


Captain Toad: Treasure Tracker
Format Switch, 3DS
Out 13 July

FEAR OF THE PARK

Jurassic World Evolution looks like it could well be the rarest species of all: a good movie tie-in



The core appeal of a Jurassic World (and Park) game has always been the parks themselves: about building your own fenced off-part of the world to keep prehistoric beasts cooped up and hoping they don't get loose. Or hoping they do, depending on how your brain is wired up. Jurassic World Evolution, coming to PS4, Xbox One, and PC in June from Frontier Developments, looks set to realise that fantasy in a more complete fashion than has ever been seen before.

Fortunately, what's come before – both from the dev team and within the wider Jurassic franchise – hasn't been forgotten or ignored. "I'm a fan of Jurassic Park: Operation Genesis and I think we're probably inspired by a lot of the same things that inspired Blue Tongue back in 2003," explains Michael Brookes, game director on Jurassic World Evolution. "That dream of running your own Jurassic island hasn't gone away, and in fact I think it's only grown stronger since Jurassic World became one of the biggest films of 2015."

With the aim of 'capturing the dream' and letting you build and run your own Jurassic Park, Evolution takes cues from the likes of Frontier's own Planet Coaster – an excellent game in its own right – and tasks players with making an appealing, interesting, unique park full of dinosaurs. And it goes deeper than that, too, with Brookes namechecking the Jurassic franchise in all its forms all the way back to its original guise as a Michael Critchton novel in 1990.

"We want to reflect the huge scope of the story and world surrounding the Jurassic series," he says, "The varied interests and challenges inside Ingen, the threats presented by the island's location and division rivalries, the day-to-day challenge of running these islands and caring for the animals, and the way a few events can spiral into disaster if you don't react to them in time. We want to put you in charge of your own Jurassic World, but we also want to let you experience the same kinds of excitement, peril, and dread you feel watching the movies by putting you into the thick of the action and letting you handle breakouts directly if you wish."

> "WE WANT TO REFLECT THE HUGE SCOPE OF THE STORY SURROUNDING THE JURASSIC SERIES"

Diversifying DNA

You can also make your own dinosaurs, we shouldn't forget. While there's a lot of management going on – placing shops and facilities, making sure your power grid is robust enough both to provide juice to all of your buildings and to stand up to the inevitable devastation wrought by a tropical storm, and setting the price of chips – there are systems layered on systems behind the scenes, and one of these involves tinkering with dinosaur DNA. Well, it wouldn't be Jurassic without that, would it?

But you're not going to be creating Frankenstein's dinosaur/monster abominations, nor will you be going down the route of Spore and making… questionable… creatures. "This is Jurassic World science," Brookes says, "so we want to keep it grounded. We're not going to let you unleash a swarm of a hundred duck-sized T-rexes (or even one T-rex-sized duck) on some unsuspecting tourists, but as you advance through the game your ability to manipulate the dinosaurs' genomes will improve. Certain physical characteristics can be tweaked and changed along with attributes such as attack, lifespan and cosmetics."

Yes, you can tweak the very building blocks of your dinosaur attractions in order to make them hardier, look better, get into more fights, or whatever it might be you want from them. Even though you are bringing back creatures from tens of

www.twitter.com/gamesmaster





You can leave it up to the AI to handle tranquilising out of control (or sick) dinos, or take direct control of both chopper and shooter.

millions of years ago and blowing plenty of minds along the way in doing so, people are fickle, and they'll get bored of the same triceratops ambling around after a short while.

That's where your old-school approach to dinosaurs comes in, in the shape of setting out on digs. It's menu-based, you're not actively out there chipping away at a New Mexico desert, but does involve sending teams away to find more samples for genetic use. The purer a specimen, the more money it can bring in, the more you can tinker with your dino-designs, and the more cash you can make on top of that. Playing god's all about profit, right?

Morals (and dinosaurs)

There's a real moral grey area surrounding all of the Jurassic franchise – those sparing no expense, such as the original movie's eccentric park founder John Hammond, are in essence bringing back a group of creatures that to all intents and purposes no longer exists. It is at very best a vanity project, and at worst a cruel way to squeeze money out of the general public just to let them see your dino-attractions. So… well, *are you a bad guy?*

"Well, John Hammond wasn't a bad guy," Brookes tells us, "The idea of Jurassic World is essentially a noble one, but one that's perhaps been corrupted by competing interests – the scientists who want to push the boundaries of bioengineering, the commercial executives who want more tourist money, the security interests who want to see just how dangerous these creatures can be…"

But your goal is one of essential good – you house your beasts and care for them, making sure they have food and space and social interactions (and naming them, though maybe not all 'Barry' like we did). "Your goals are noble," Brookes continues, "But we've made sure your morality is tested in the assignments you'll receive along the way, and that Dr Ian Malcolm is always around to remind players of the moral ambiguity of their activities."

"WE WANT YOU TO FEEL THAT CREEPING SENSE OF DREAD AS THINGS SPIRAL OUT OF HAND"

Ah yes, Dr Malcolm. Making his second appearance in a Jurassic game (and third in the movies), the iconic Jeff Goldblum is back in the role of the chaos theory-wielding scientist/absurdly charming man. More than just a celebrity guest, though, Goldblum's character offers you the chance to pause and really consider what it is you're doing: "[He acts] as a conscience of sorts. He's the one who advises you on the morally ambiguous tasks you'll be handed, and the one who's always there to remind you that life can't be contained."

Because, ah, it, ah, wouldn't be, ah, the same, ah, unless, ah, you were able to say, ah, life… ah… *finds a way*.

Chaos, then, plays a big part in Jurassic World Evolution, and we can't help but welcome that with open arms. Aside from it being a core concept in the Jurassic franchise, with the inability to actually control what's going on front and centre from beginning to end, it's going to make the game itself a lot more fun (and challenging) to play.

"One of the key themes of the series is chaos, yeah," Brookes says, "Disasters in Jurassic movies rarely come out of nowhere, or from one source. In the first Jurassic Park movie it's right there at the start of the film – Dennis Nedry makes the decision to steal dino DNA from Jurassic Park, which leads him to shut down the park's security systems. It's in the middle of a storm, so any staff who might help contain a disaster have been evacuated. The power is shut down, the electrified fences switch off. Dinosaurs escape. It's lots of problems, not just one, and they compound each other so chaos ensues."

This feeling of escalating calamity, of cascading waves of chaos smashing

It's nice to see any fence in the Jurassic franchise actually committed to doing its job of being a fence. So many over the years have slacked off, with deadly consequences.

against you as you try to hold back the dino-tide, is present throughout Evolution. "We want you to feel that creeping sense of dread as things begin to spiral out of hand," Brookes adds. "You might be able to handle one power failure, a single storm, a lone theft or an escaped dinosaur, but any one problem left for too long can cause chaos. A rough storm can cause power outages, power failures can shut down electrified fences, broken fences can allow dinosaurs to escape, escaped dinosaurs can damage other enclosures, and so on."

In short, you need to keep on top of plenty of small crises as the game progresses, or they can – and will – escalate into much bigger issues later on. It's important not to be put off by this challenge, mind you. If you're looking for a simpler life, you will be able to stick with earlier islands where dinosaurs are



Here's an example of a bad time to hit that button in your wheelyball marked 'ramming speed'.



Taking things out of the dino paddocks, the park itself is customisable enough to be interesting and engaging.



Yes, you can drop different dinosaurs in the same pen just to watch them fight. And yes it is *awesome*.

SURVIVAL OF THE FITTEST

We're very kind here at GamesMaster, so went out of our way to get some top tips for you straight from Brookes. This way you can be prepared ahead of Evolution's release, and have an idea in your head of how you want to play: "You could build an all-scientific island and advance genetic research with your experiments," he tells us, "or you could build a Jurassic World for tourists, or you could build a military-style security research facility.

"Remember that in Jurassic World, Isla Nublar is a tourist destination, scientific research facility, and security outpost all at the same time: it pays to do a little of everything. We like games where choices have meaning and consequences, and where following one route might make other paths harder." Brookes recommends picking a single path and sticking to it, but not being afraid to branch out to other opportunities that come your way.

And a final tip? "Oh, and make sure your power grid is strong – you'll find repairs are easier if it's not a wild tangle of wires and sub-stations!"

These two look like they're about to drop the year's biggest mixtape. They aren't, though – they're just eating grass and stuff.



FLIGHT OR FIGHT?

The discovery of feathered, non-avian dinosaur fossils happened after the first Jurassic Park film, from 1996 on, but before any of the Jurassic World franchise. So why do we have yet another game with scaly, lizard-like beasts instead of ones covered in glorious plumage? Well, it's all in the fiction, as Brookes explains: "This is [the] Jurassic [franchise's] science and Jurassic World's dinosaurs have scales. Dr Wu even comments on it in Jurassic World when he talks about how gaps into the dinosaurs' genomes are filled with the DNA of other animals, and how the dinosaurs might look different if they had a pure sample. For that reason, you won't see feathered dinosaurs in Jurassic World Evolution."

Still, at least we get to see some bright and beautiful colouration on some of the dino skin, so you won't just be staring at the greys and browns those (very) old textbooks told you were Definitely How Dinosaurs Looked.

You've got to hope these things don't evolve a catlike love of batting balls round playfully.

"WHEN ALL IS SAID AND DONE, THE PEOPLE OF THE JURASSIC FRANCHISE ARE THE TRUE MONSTERS"

PARK AND RIDE

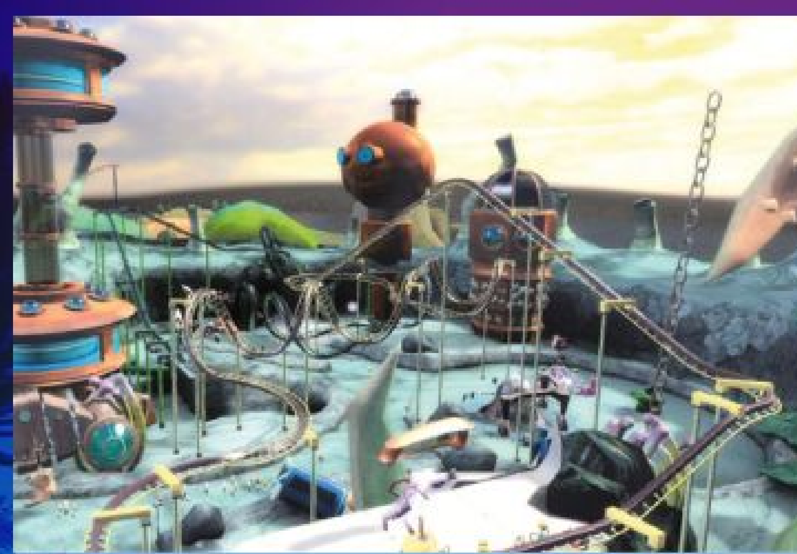
Frontier was making park-based games before the Jurassic era



2003-05

Rollercoaster Tycoon
(PC, Xbox)

An Xbox port, expansion packs, then the third game all to itself – Frontier worked its way up the series.



2006-07

Thrillville
(PC, 360, Xbox, PS2)

A misstep maybe, but the decent Thrillville gave Frontier more valuable console experience.



2010

Kinectimals
(360)

Kinect's fuzziest game laid the foundations for animal animations we see in JWE...


These colourful corythosaurus are herbivores. However, even if they're not going to eat you, they can still cause you a whole world of trouble.

calmer, the weather is predictable, and the chance of a Dennis Nedry stealing tech is… minimised, let's say.

Saur winner

"No matter how you play, your goal is to expand your empire across the whole of the Muertes Archipelago," Brookes explains. "Jurassic World Evolution's campaign will take you around the five islands – each with their own climate, terrain and other unique challenges – as you develop new dinosaurs, new technologies and complete objectives for Ingen's Science, Entertainment, and Security divisions."

Aside from the challenges that come with managing dinosaurs in differing environments (and dealing with those massive storms), you also have to manage the human element. Again, it's something that can contribute to the chaos of Evolution, but it's something that – if carefully managed – will provide you with boosts to your park, however you choose to run it. Just try not to work too closely with one of the three divisions (Security, Science, and Entertainment) without paying the others any attention, as lopsided development can and will lead to *negative consequences*.

Because, when all is said and done, it's the people of the Jurassic franchise who are the true monsters. The beasts they bring back from extinction are just that – animals in an unfamiliar world, doing what it is animals do. They don't climb all over each other just to get a bit of praise, or a bit more money, or for the glory and recognition. They just hang out and eat stuff, sometimes chattering to their own kind, sometimes fighting, and sometimes getting too stressed and breaking out of their enclosures to make a meal of some of your visitors.

Making sure the animals are happy and not causing unchecked devastation should be a walk in the park (excuse the pun) compared to making sure the people around you aren't out solely for their own selfish gains. Walking that tightrope between morality and making the business as profitable as it can be: that's a challenge. Making sure the people are happy and aren't screwing each other over: that's a challenge. Putting some recreated 65-million-year-old gigantic animals into a pen and keeping them fed, watered, and out of trouble? That's the easy part!



2011

Kinect: Disneyland Adventures

(360)

...while Disneyland provided Frontier with experience of working with a gigantic license.



2013

Zoo Tycoon

(XO, 360)

Many were focused on Elite Dangerous, but Frontier didn't forget about its park aspirations.



2015

Screamride

(XO, 360)

A diamond in the rough from Xbox One's early days, Screamride's coaster-puzzles were brilliant fun.



2016

Planet Coaster

(PC)

Frontier's latest park builder, and the one that has most in common with Jurassic World Evolution.

65 MILLION YEARS OF GAMES...

Join us for a look back on the long and storied history of Jurassic Park games

There have been so many games based on Jurassic Park over the years that it's hard to find someone who hasn't played at least one of them. And with so many to choose from, it's as easy to find a great one as it is a terrible one, and even easier to find a few that are just plain *weird*. With everyone excited about Jurassic World Evolution, we decided now would be the perfect time to dig through the fossil records, so we can display it all to you – the good, the bad, and the downright strange…



Jurassic Park
PC, Amiga
- 1993 -

The first Jurassic Park game was a top-down mix of exploration, simple puzzles, and shooting prehistoric creatures in the face. The most interesting part about it was its early first-person shooter levels… though they finished at 'interesting' and didn't progress into the realms of 'good'. Versions of Jurassic Park on NES, Game Boy, and SNES were similar to the Amiga and PC game, but did have enough small differences to mark them as their own thing.

Jurassic Park
Mega Drive
- 1993 -

Sega's console got its own take on Jurassic Park, with a side-scrolling platformer where players took control of Dr Alan Grant or, brilliantly, a velociraptor. It's a fondly remembered game, mainly down to the fact *you could be a dinosaur*. Who wouldn't recall that fondly? The Rampage Edition followed soon after: a hasty sequel/revamp that trod on most of the goodwill garnered from the original thanks to it adding very little of note. So we'll just ignore that one.





Jurassic Park 2: The Chaos Continues
SNES, Game Boy
- 1994 -

Pre-empting the movie sequel, JP2 on SNES took a tack unfamiliar to the franchise but very familiar to those who owned consoles of the time: a side-scrolling shooter. Action-packed and full of big monster (well, dinosaur) setpieces, it attempted to bridge the gap between the likes of Contra 3 and John Hammond's gene-splicing theme park with some very mixed results. Admittedly it still ended up better than the gymnastics scene from the JP2 movie.

Jurassic Park Interactive
3DO
- 1994 -

The first game Universal created in-house was typical of the era – a jumble of video sequences, minigames and confusing controls, objectives, and outcomes. Having said that, JP Interactive did manage to make a name for itself in the mid-'90s thanks to its brilliant raptors and their happy little faces when they killed you. Alas, in typical movie-game tie-in fashion, the actual game bits left a lot to be desired and this one was ultimately forgotten.





Jurassic Park
Arcade
- 1994 -

The Jurassic Park (and World) movies preach a message of pacifism towards our prehistoric pals, as after all they are merely animals acting as animals do. Jurassic Park in the arcades, from Sega, did not get this memo. In it, you drive around on-rails and shoot any and every dinosaur that gets in your way – including the poor old herbivores. It was followed by sequels for the following two films, each keeping the same theme but upping things in the tech stakes. They were all good, dumb fun.

The Lost World: Jurassic Park

PS1, Saturn

- 1997 -

A thoroughly unremarkable game which was likely enjoyed by many who played it when they were impressionable and young. (We all liked the odd rubbish game when we were kids; don't deny it.) In fact, The Lost World: Jurassic Park is something we wouldn't even bother to include here were it not for the wonderful hidden ending, unlocked by finding every collectible in the game, where Jeff Goldblum (playing Dr Ian Malcolm) subtly mocks your achievements and tells you to go outside to 'get the stink blown off you'. It is, quite frankly, bizarre. And brilliant.







Trespasser

PC

- 1998 -

Commonly featured in lists of games that tried to do something wonderful and failed miserably, Trespasser was a unique take on the FPS genre and one of the earliest examples of a game using realistic (for the time) physics as a core element. What this meant was you had to navigate your hand to pick up a gun, the game would inevitably bug out, you'd accidentally throw a pistol at a raptor, then you'd die because you were laughing too hard. It's utterly awful, but so much fun.



Warpath: Jurassic Park

PS1

- 1999 -

Not to be outdone by Star Wars: Masters Of Teras Kasi, the world of Jurassic Park entered the one-on-one fighting genre with Warpath. While not exactly overencumbered when it came to the technical aspects of its genre stablemates, Warpath did at least operate as an exercise in catharsis as you battered a pachycephalosaurus with a T. rex. Additionally, Warpath didn't go down in history as a PlayStation great, but it *was* still a better game than Teras Kasi. Small mercies.

Jurassic Park: Scan Command

PC

- 2001 -

Delighting children the world over – though mainly those in the US – Scan Command was an advanced version of what was once the Barcode Battler. You scanned in barcodes, which gave you dinos of differing abilities, then pitted them in battles against other barcode-generated prehistoric pests to see who would come out on top. In retrospect, it was objectively terrible, but in practice, at the time, any dino-obsessed youngster who played it would have been hard pressed not to love it.





Jurassic Park: Operation Genesis

PC, Xbox, PS2

- 2003 -

There were park builders before and after this one, but Operation Genesis is the game that everyone remembers. In it you did, of course, build your very own theme park full of dinosaurs – tending not just to the needs of your beasts, but of the other beasts roaming around (aka those park visitors with pockets full of cash). A lot of ideas from Genesis carry over into Jurassic World Evolution, and rightly so – it wasn't a classic, but it was good fun.

Jurassic Park: The Game

PC, iOS, PS3, 360

- 2011 -

Telltale had yet to knock it out of the park with The Walking Dead, so expectations for its Jurassic Park tie-in weren't stratospheric. It still managed to *not* live up to them. While the story was typical Telltale fare – warm and engaging – the actual game bits were lacking, and the overall package was riddled with bugs and issues. Thankfully the studio did recover (in spectacular fashion, no less) but JP could have spelled disaster for the team.





Lego Jurassic World

PC, PS4, XO, PS3, 360

- 2015 -

The Lego tie-in to the Jurassic franchise boiled down everything that's great about the Lego games into one package: it linked to a new blockbuster movie, it appealed to kids, it recreated scenes in Lego form, and it offered drop-in multiplayer. It also linked to the original Jurassic Park, thus appealing to older players, recreated classic scenes from movie legend with the original voices. Lego Jurassic World is everything a Lego game should be. And not just because it has that classic score.

GM Subscribe

Never Miss An Issue!



CHOOSE YOUR PACKAGE

For all your multiformat needs, subscribe today to the world's most dedicated gaming mag. We have three options to choose from...

PRINT



SIX-MONTH SUBSCRIPTION

£30

- It costs less than buying it in the shops!
- Delivered to your door every month!
- Never miss an issue!

DIGITAL

Save 28%

QUARTERLY SUBSCRIPTION

£7

- The cheapest way to get your GM!
- Every issue is packed with trailers and videos!
- Download instantly on the day of release!

PRINT & DIGITAL



QUARTERLY SUBSCRIPTION

£19



- The best-value GM package!
- Every print issue delivered to you!
- A digital copy for iOS or Android!
- New trailers and videos each month!

BUY A SIX-MONTH PRINT SUBSCRIPTION AND GET A VENOM POWER PACK & STAND FOR NINTENDO SWITCH*



*NINTENDO SWITCH NOT INCLUDED

- HIGH-CAPACITY RECHARGEABLE POWER PACK
- BUILT-IN KICKSTAND
- LOCKS CONSOLE SECURELY INTO PLACE
- CHARGING CABLE INCLUDED

GO ONLINE:
WWW.MYFAVOURITEMAGAZINES.CO.UK/VPP
OR CALL 0344 848 2852

*Terms and conditions: This offer entitles new UK Direct Debit subscribers to pay just £30 every six months plus receive a gift worth £29.99. Gift is only available for new UK subscribers. Gift is subject to availability. Please allow up to 60 days for the delivery of your gift. In the event of stocks being exhausted we reserve the right to replace with items of similar value. Prices and savings quoted are compared to buying full-priced print issues. You will receive 13 issues in a year. Your subscription is for the minimum term specified and will expire at the end of the current term. You can write to us or call us to cancel your subscription within 14 days of purchase. Payment is non-refundable after the 14 day cancellation period unless exceptional circumstances apply. Your statutory rights are not affected. Prices correct at point of print and subject to change. . UK calls will cost the same as other standard fixed line numbers (starting 01 or 02) or are included as part of any inclusive or free minutes allowances (if offered by your phone tariff).
For full terms and conditions please visit: www.bit.ly/magterms. Offer ends 31 August.

Hey, I heard you like The Wild Run – Oh, you meant the Flo Rida song? We apologise.

"IF THIS WAS ALL THERE WAS, JUST A SANDBOX AND A WORLD MAP, IT'D STILL BE GOOD"



What is this, a continent for ants? Oh, hang on, we're just really high up. Got it now. Better make sure we come back down without too much of a bump.



The water effects are really something, and they're not just for show either – choppy surf will slow you down as your boat tries to plough through the turbulence.

Format PS4, XO, PC **Publisher** Ubisoft
Developer Ivory Tower **ETA** 29 June

THE CREW 2

For Ubisoft's hugely ambitous racer it's a case of planes, growing pains, and automobiles

Ivory Tower would have you believe that this is a racing game about three distinct disciplines: cars, boats, and planes. But it actually goes deeper. So deep, in fact, that after a few minutes inside its infectiously thrill-obsessed world you wonder whether the devs haven't thrown in Segways and conga lines for good measure.

Blitzing the Pacific coast highway on a superbike at F-Zero speeds. Flying under Golden Gate Bridge upside down in a stunt plane, pupils pin-sized with concentration. Narrowly missing rock after rock in a sprint boat, then transforming into a Citroën WRC car with a tap of the right analog stick when dry land approaches. If you can dream a particular mode of transport tearing up a patch of America, you can make it happen in The Crew 2. And if this was all there was to it, just a sandbox of vehicles and a huge world map, it would still be a very good game.

And after listening to a few excitable voiceovers bleating about gaining more social media followers in career mode, the thought does cross your mind that it might even be a better game. Grating as the tone can be, though, it's better suited to an experience such as this than the first Crew's bizarrely gritty revenge yarn. Instead of another undercover cop caper for the sequel, Ivory Tower wisely embraces a more lighthearted approach and builds a quasi-narrative around the accumulation of reputation and followers – think Forza Horizon with a few more exclamation marks. It does the job, and narrative was never going to be of tremendous importance in a game where the world folds in half as you change from a car to a plane.

Tune-up

Speaking of improvements on the first game, let's talk handling. It was a notable weak spot before, lacking responsiveness; that satisfying squirliness of holding a car right on the limit through a corner. And it's better now. Definitely better, and definitely impressive for the range of



Street cars look beautiful inside and out: should you ever venture to use the cockpit cam you'll find high-detail trim. Give it a go, and marvel at your super-shiny car.



Routes for races are much more imaginative than in the original, making better use of verticality and landmarks. It's naturally massively more exciting.



Ladas on tour

Must-see spots in The Crew 2's USA

Eastside

East coast life is all about 90-degree turns through downtown racing circuits, drizzle, and a drive out to the Hamptons when urban greyness gets you down. Boat rides round Lady Liberty recommended.



Westside

Out west there's the Golden Gate bridge to tick off the bucket list, the Mario Kart-level weirdness of Vegas and its faux landmarks, LA's sprawl, and Seattle's surrounding forests to explore off-road.



Southside

Head south and you'll find Florida waiting for you, particularly receptive to boat adventures around Miami and, just further west, journeys up the Great River Road all the way up to Detroit.



Countryside

Get off the beaten track and The Crew 2 becomes a different game, full of rolling hills to be explored by buggy or dirt bike. We recommend the northern Oregon Trail – ah, dysentery.



vehicle types it simulates. But, as a by-product of the many vehicles available here, slightly uneven.

Street racing, touring cars, buggies… anything with four wheels, really, feels just marvellous to control. There's some top-notch controller feedback programming and sound design going on every time you get behind the wheel, lending a deeper sense of connectedness to the car than the original could ever offer. You do have to take down the traction control quite a bit to unleash it, though: on default assist settings, with the car practically driving itself, it feels stiff and unsatisfying, like a sandwich you forgot about then tried to eat upon finding three hours later. We imagine.

Boats… Well, boats are as enjoyable as it's possible to make boats, we suppose. In the absence of real twists and turns (because you're in open water) the challenge and gratification is instead found by picking ultra-efficient lines between waypoints and gunning it with the left stick cocked back for a touch extra speed. Highly rubber-banded AI does its best to make the racing close, as in other disciplines, but it can't match land events for sheer enjoyment. While they might lack in high-octane competitive jostling, however, boats make a fine mode of virtual tourism transport. Journeying up the east coast from Florida to New York, dynamic day/night cycle rolling through magical dawn to cosmic night, you're glad of aquatic transport's inclusion.

Taking to the air is a real pleasure in free roam mode, too. The detail of the world below you scales very well at higher altitudes, retaining the atmosphere of each location, weather scenario, and time of day. The stunts you pull – loops, knife edges, flying upside down and at low altitude – feel limited after a couple of hours, but the scenery's always there to keep your interest.

"THERE'S SOMETHING NEW AND UNDISCOVERED IN THE TOYBOX; SOMETHING TO WORK FOR"

Then there are the bikes. These feel like they've spent the least time in Ivory Tower's game-baking oven, thrilling and preposterously behaved in equal measure. Street and superbikes are sheer dumbed-down fun at 180mph, particularly with the first-person camera. Dirt bikes, however, just don't feel quite right yet. Their turning circles and in-air behaviour, along with rider animations, look and feel unnatural and a touch work-in-progress. That's reasonable at this stage, of course: the game's literally a work in progress.



It's a living

Few games offer this many transport types, and none do so with the added deal-sweetener of swapping between them mid-race. We'd expected that The Crew 2 might make more of that feature



We hope there's a service station coming up some time soon – we're dying for a Wimpy and a bag of Percy Pigs.



Ubisoft's technical prowess at building vast open worlds shows through in every horizon – it's a map you want to explore for exploration's own sake.

The number of licensed cars is greatly expanded since the original – and licensed bikes, boats, and planes join them in the garage.

Determined to offer something fresher than tired old urban circuit racing, elevated race layouts like this feel like a new challenge. Seatbelts on, mind.

in its career mode, but multi-vehicle races were rare in the first four hours of career mode that we played, triggered only when we levelled up in popularity. It feels more like a free roam treat than a core component of career mode racing, and frankly we're fine with that.

Structurally, career mode works in a similar way to the first game – event types are split by vehicle type and discipline, and new disciplines are unlocked by gaining popularity. Which you do by winning races, duh. Complete the first tier of street races and you'll unlock drift events (which feature a fantastic handling model, something very few games succeed in with their drift modes). Nail the first few off-road buggy races and motocross becomes available. In this way, it always feels like there's something new and undiscovered in the toybox; something to work for.

The central quandary of The Crew remains the same in this sequel as in the first game, though: does it make full use of that fantastic – honest-to-goodness fantastic – world map in its events? We haven't played enough yet to make that call, but it's obviously been a big focus for Ivory Tower, evidenced by the breadth of vehicles and disciplines. And the worst case scenario is that you'll have to look for the best journeys yourself, crafting road trips by dropping a waypoint somewhere and venturing yonder by land, air, or sea. ■ ***Phil Iwaniuk***

GM Instant Reaction

+ A world map that makes for gaming's best impromptu road trips. Oh, and air, sea, river, and cross-country trips too.

– Although car handling has come a long way from the original game, dirt bikes still feel a bit janky and simplistic.

THRILL-O-METER

1 2 3 **4** 5

Fun, squared. No bloat, no dour plot – just you, your steed, and the world.



AI drivers might be rubber-banded slightly too much at this stage – they're a menacing pack in your mirrors throughout.





Lara's climbing axes are back, but she can now also rappel up and down cliff faces, and hide in the greenery if there's creeper cover.

Format PS4, XO, PC **Publisher** Square Enix
Developer Eidos Montreal **ETA** 14 September

SHADOW OF THE TOMB RAIDER

The beginning of the end. There will be blood. And tears

It's testament to how influential Star Wars is that the second one used to be the 'dark' one, and the third one had the teddy bears in. In 2018, though, darkness reigns. You're not a hero unless you have a bag of issues. Batman sears his symbol into people's flesh. Superman is responsible for genocide. And Lara Croft? She's so vain, she probably thinks this preview is about her. (It is.)

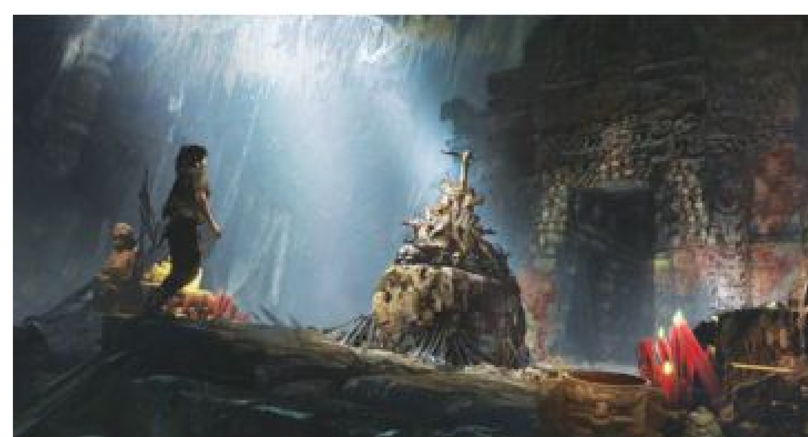


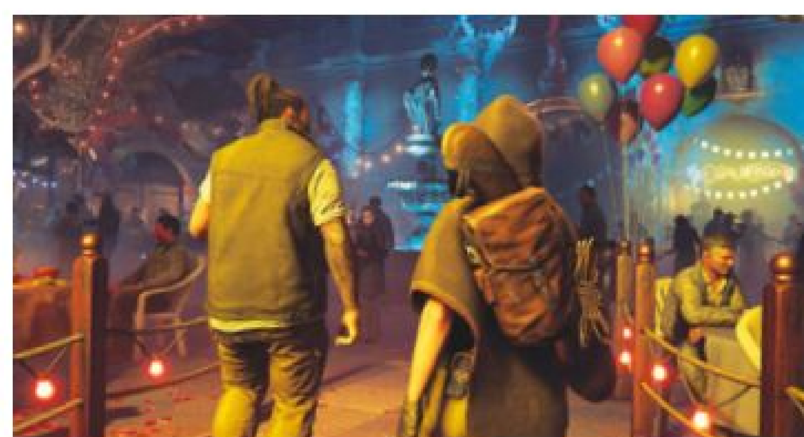
To give credit where it's due, the game she's in looks amazing. In our hands-on with Shadow Of The Tomb Raider, Eidos Montreal's final instalment in Lara's origin story, it's essentially a greatest hits package of the two preceding games. If you're a newcomer it holds your hand while you learn the ropes (which in a new twist, you can now use to rappel down cliff faces). If you're a veteran, it's a nostalgic primer for the adventure to come. The action is pretty formulaic, despite Lara revealing a couple of new tricks (as well as the rappelling, you can now find cover in walls of ivy). But was anyone looking for a reinvention of the formula? Really?

Doom raider

It's the story we're here for, the tale of how Lara Croft, entitled but grieving orphan, became the Tomb Raider. And it's here that everything is different. Lara begins this adventure in a Mexican town, celebrating Dia De Los Muertos – The Day Of The Dead – with Jonah. It looks amazing. What follows are segments where Lara uncovers a conspiracy (cut-glass-gasp: "Trinity!"), Lara decides to end the conspiracy, Lara ballses it all up and costs people their lives. And then, wracked with guilt and grief, she has the tantrum to end all tantrums. It's left to Jonah to put her in her place.

Mechanically, Shadow Of The Tomb Raider doesn't look like it's going anywhere new. Emotionally, it's fresh territory all the way. ■ *James McMahon*





GM Instant Reaction

+ Appears to mine crevices in Lara's story that we've never delved into before. Proper grown-up storytelling ensues.

– If you're looking for Shadow to feel different from Tomb Raider and Rise, you may be disappointed. It feels very familiar.

THRILL-O-METER



The rebooted trilogy ends with Lara's darkest chapter ever.







While the game starts in Mexico, with an absolutely gorgeous-looking Day Of The Dead festival, Lara's journey will take her further into South America, to Peru.



The underwater segment we play makes us feel the sort of anxiety we come to the series for. And that's before the eel turns up...

Format PS4, PC **Publisher** Double Fine
Developer Foam Sword **ETA** Summer

KNIGHTS AND BIKES

In need of adventure in 1980s Cornwall? On your bike!

No object harks back to childhood like a bicycle. For a kid, riding one opens up the freedom to go on all sorts of adventures, which is precisely the spirit Foam Sword's game embodies.

You play as best friends Nessa and Demelza (a real friend can drop in to control the latter), seeking adventure in their Cornish island hometown Penfurzy. Though the wonderful art style portrays this through a child's eye, there are hints at something darker underneath, especially when we play a segment set in a scrapyard, traversing a dilapidated landscape, while abandoned mines float on the water, liable to explode at the slightest touch.

The first puzzle finds our path blocked by a fence that we can only get around on foot, so we fiddle with a nearby crane to figure out how to bring our bikes over. The bikes will be upgradable, though in our demo they're mainly used for speedy travel, which serves as a good excuse for impromptu races with each other.

Bound together

Although it has the look of an old-school top-down JRPG, combat is real-time and more like a simple beat-'em-up, while the tykes carry age-appropriate weapons such as Frisbees and water balloons to hurl at their imaginary foes. There's room for co-op tactics – Nessa can drop one of her water balloons for Demelza to kick at the enemy for greater damage, and the two high-five to heal – not that we find an encounter challenging enough to properly try the latter.

Despite Earthbound being cited as an influence, difficulty doesn't appear to be a priority, especially for Demelza, who's been designed for a more button-mashing player two, like a younger sibling. It still makes for a charming experience, while the rural island setting is certainly something different. Knights And Bikes pedals to the finish line later this year. ■ ***Alan Wen***





The scrapyard may look gloomy, but who hasn't snuck off to such places as a kid in search of mischief?

GM Instant Reaction

\+ The whimsical art style shines, and a game about friendship that includes co-op play will always look like a winner.

− The puzzles and combat don't feel particularly challenging, the Earthbound influence seemingly dropped.

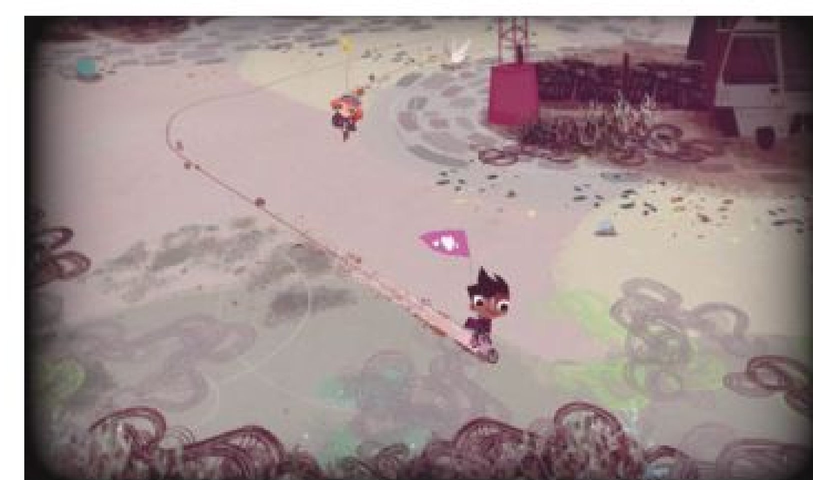
THRILL-O-METER 1 2 3 4 5 (3)

A charming adventure to stir childhood memories of friendship.



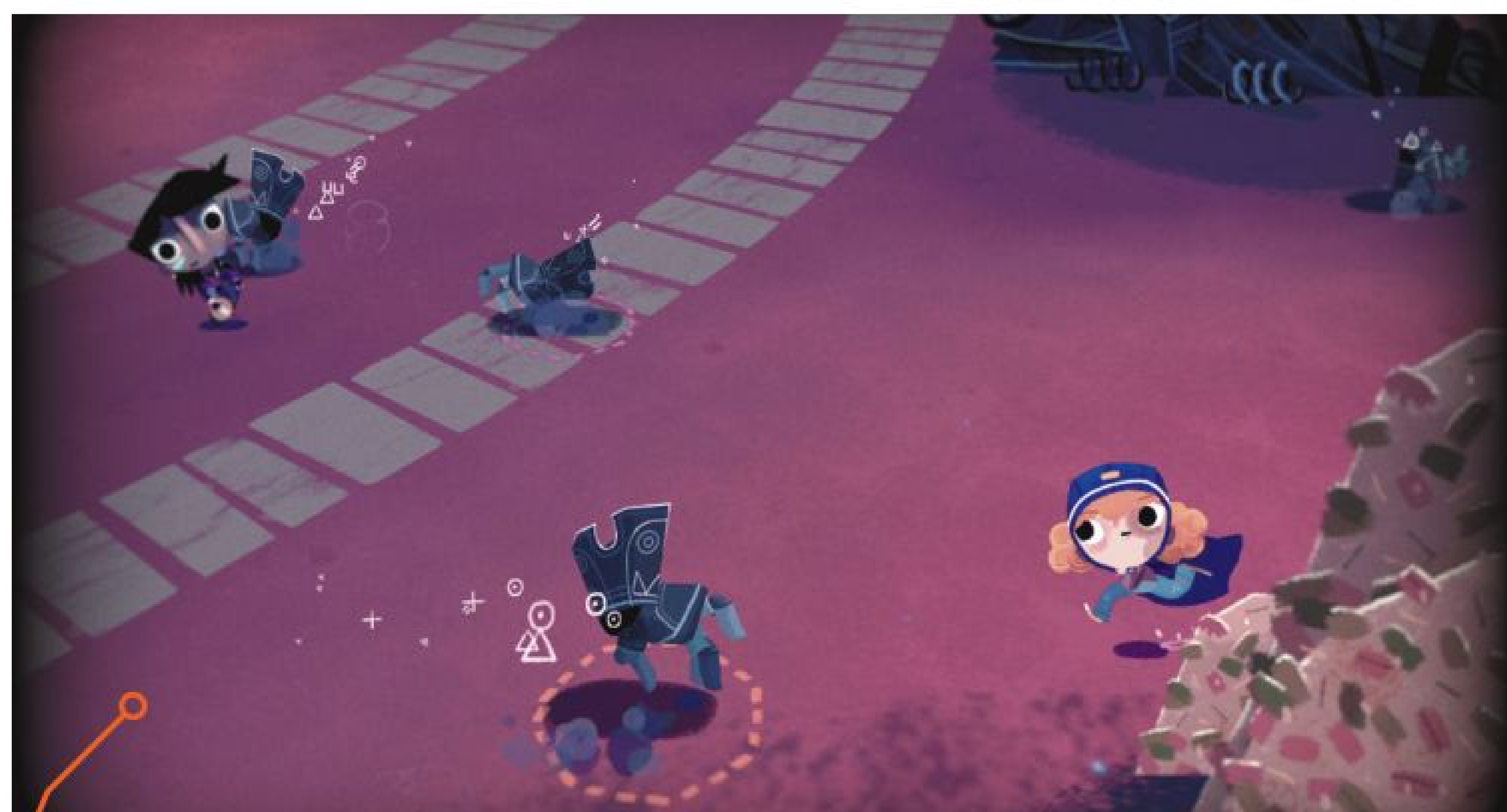








Following the two girls' adventures is their pet goose Captain Honkers. He doesn't do much, but you can pet him. Which is pretty brave – geese are savage.



Combat takes place in real-time, with inanimate objects coming to life as a product of the children's imagination, to be defeated with Frisbees and water balloons.



Taking out enemies who can call for backup is your number one priority.

Format PS4, XO, PC **Publisher** Funcom **Developer** The Bearded Ladies **ETA** Winter

MUTANT YEAR ZERO: ROAD TO EDEN

Duck and cover

There's no shortage of games set after armageddon, but we defy you to think of any that feature a humanoid talking duck. Not just a duck either; Mutant Year Zero: Road To Eden, besides having a pretty awkward title, is home to many other anthropomorphic creatures and mutated people, evolved to better survive the wasteland they inhabit.

They're Stalkers, mutants sent out from a last remaining refuge for humans into the world beyond to search for supplies to sustain the community. A dangerous line of work. Dev The Bearded Ladies invited us to have a closer look, and the team of mutants we're shown are suitably grumpy about their lot.

That colourful cast serve as the soldiers for XCOM-style turn-based strategy action. There's a cover system, unique abilities, and tough-as-nails enemies – but also a few significant twists on the familiar formula. For starters the emphasis is on stealth and exploration. Outside of combat you control your squad directly, moving them about big areas (that all connect to form a larger world) and trying to avoid being detected by roaming foes. It's a nicely detailed world, and we see some fun little bits of world building, such as the Stalkers thinking the poster for a cartoon moose mascot is some kind of evil deity from before the end times. The tone of the game is definitely a touch lighter than most post-apocalyptic titles.



While undetected, you can initiate ambushes, giving yourself an advantage. If you're seen, though, the enemy gets the first turn and you'll be scrambling to make sure they don't alert more enemies. Silent weapons are encouraged, and prioritising enemies who can call for reinforcements defines the game's rhythm: explore, find your enemies, pick out the dangerous ones, and begin picking them off. If you're smart, you'll avoid an all-out firefight.

Alter egos

The game's other big twist is mutations. Your characters are customisable outside of combat but rather than simply grinding up a big skill tree, abilities you unlock are part of an interchangeable roster. You're encouraged to switch things up and tailor your squad for each encounter. We see the aforementioned talking duck given bat wings (yes, even though he's a *duck*), allowing him to take to the air and earn a boost to range and damage. There's also rock skin, which as you might imagine, makes your character all the tougher to kill.

Fights themselves do strongly resemble XCOM even if the precise flavour is a little different. But the stealth layer around combat gives Mutant Year Zero something of its own, and with ex-Hitman devs on board, there's every reason to believe they'll make it work. Their aim, however, is to make a less fiddly stealth experience, simplifying loads of actions and making enemy







Sneak into the Ghoul base and this giant, mutant-killing robot is yours to seize control of. It's out of power when you find it, but as you're here to snatch a generator anyway, you might as well have some fun…



The Ark is the game's hub and the last, post-apocalyptic refuge for humanity. Duck-man-ity. Whatever.





Though broken up into sections, there is a huge world for you to explore, with secrets to find.

vision clear so as to avoid confusion. They want to avoid scenarios where players are frustrated because it wasn't clear what they did wrong.

The section we see is from the mid-game, and already Mutant Year Zero looks quite polished. The environments are lovingly detailed, with some really atmospheric lighting – dark shadows and thick fogs, the beams of your characters' torches guiding the way. Everything apparently takes place in Sweden so the developers are drawing from their surroundings, and that knowledge of the environment shows. The objective for the Stalkers is to obtain a power generator from a violent clan of mutants called the Ghouls. Making their way to the central base is methodical. The generator they possess is used to power all manner of defences, so our plucky heroes must make their way around, creeping through several outposts en route to another way to enter the fort.

Once there, a stealthy entrance allows them to sneak in and tinker with the Ghouls' massive robot. Drones and mechs in Mutant Year Zero's world are programmed to hunt and kill mutants, but if you sneak up on one, it's possible to hack it and use it for your own ends.

Duck hunt

The developers also show us a playthrough where they throw caution to the wind and go in guns blazing. They put up a good fight but their foes descend on them furiously. Enemy types such as the Heavy Ghoul smash through walls and charge directly for your team, knocking them down and putting them out for a turn. It's safe to say our heroes don't last long and are quickly taken apart. This really emphasises just how essential stealth is to the experience. This isn't a game where sneaking around is a mere option – it's a vital part of gameplay, and it's the special DNA that sets the game apart from XCOM.

While for now the experience is completely single-player, the developers have said that multiplayer may be added post-release.

The demo we're shown is relatively brief, but already Mutant Year Zero has set itself apart. It's a handsome, strange world with quirky characters but it's also a thoughtful, sneakier take on a winning turn-based formula. ■ ***Sam Greer***

"THE TONE OF THE GAME IS DEFINITELY LIGHTER THAN MOST POST-APOCALYPTIC TITLES"

GM Instant Reaction

+ A simple but clever stealthy twist on the XCOM formula. Though derivative, the world is engrossing and fun.

– There are a lot of great turn-based games out there – does Mutant have enough twists to stand out from the pack?

THRILL-O-METER

1 2 3 4 5

Stealth + strategy + talking ducks = a great time in the making.

GM **Preview**

Future Hits Played Now!


The Clockwork Sun fills your crew with terror as you approach it.

Format PC **Publisher** Failbetter Games
Developer Failbetter Games **ETA** September

SUNLESS SKIES

Rails? Where we're going we don't need rails...

Delayed after layoffs at Failbetter Games, Sunless Skies continues to add new content through Steam Early Access, the most recent update bringing a second region to explore: Albion. Your flying steam locomotive – sure to raise some eyebrows among train spotters – is the least strange thing to be found in these skies.

Imagine someone had tried to draw the British Empire at its height, but taken the term 'exploded diagram' too literally, and you've got Albion. You're certain to run into a famous Westminster clock floating about in Sunless Skies' weird gravity-free world, but it's the unfamiliar and the unknown that carve the heart of this narrative/survival RPG.

Sunless Skies, like Sunless Seas before it, is a game of questions. Who are you? What do you want? What is the airspeed velocity of an unladen steam train? It then goes on to provide answers, in some depth, as each choice you make builds a story around your captain's deeds. No explanation is given for the shattered state of the world, nor how, shorn of the necessary mass to retain an atmosphere, life is able to continue on the rocks, crystals, and giant plants that make up the floating remains.

London calling

When flying, a neat trick is the use of the locomotive's headlight – if an object casts a shadow, it's in the same plane as you. If it doesn't, then it's below you and can safely be crossed without a collision damaging your hull. There's more to piloting a flying train than avoiding damage, however. You're armed, but firing generates heat, and too much heat is a bad thing. Your loco runs on fuel and your crew on supplies, both of which must be husbanded, while your crew's fear must also be managed. The cold terrors of the High Wilderness – metal fish and swarms of bees are the least of your worries – extend to the amount of reading on offer, but it's worth squinting slightly to draw in the exquisite exposition and character portraits on offer. Much of the game is exploration, plugging forward into the mists with an eye on your supplies, but the rewards for new discoveries are ample. ■ ***Ian Evenden***

60% complete





GM **Instant Reaction**

+ An exciting world full of intrigue, danger, canning machinery, and flying trains. Even the bees are to be reckoned with.

– There's a lot of holding the 'forward' button while your train chugs across cloudy wastes, with nothing interesting in sight.

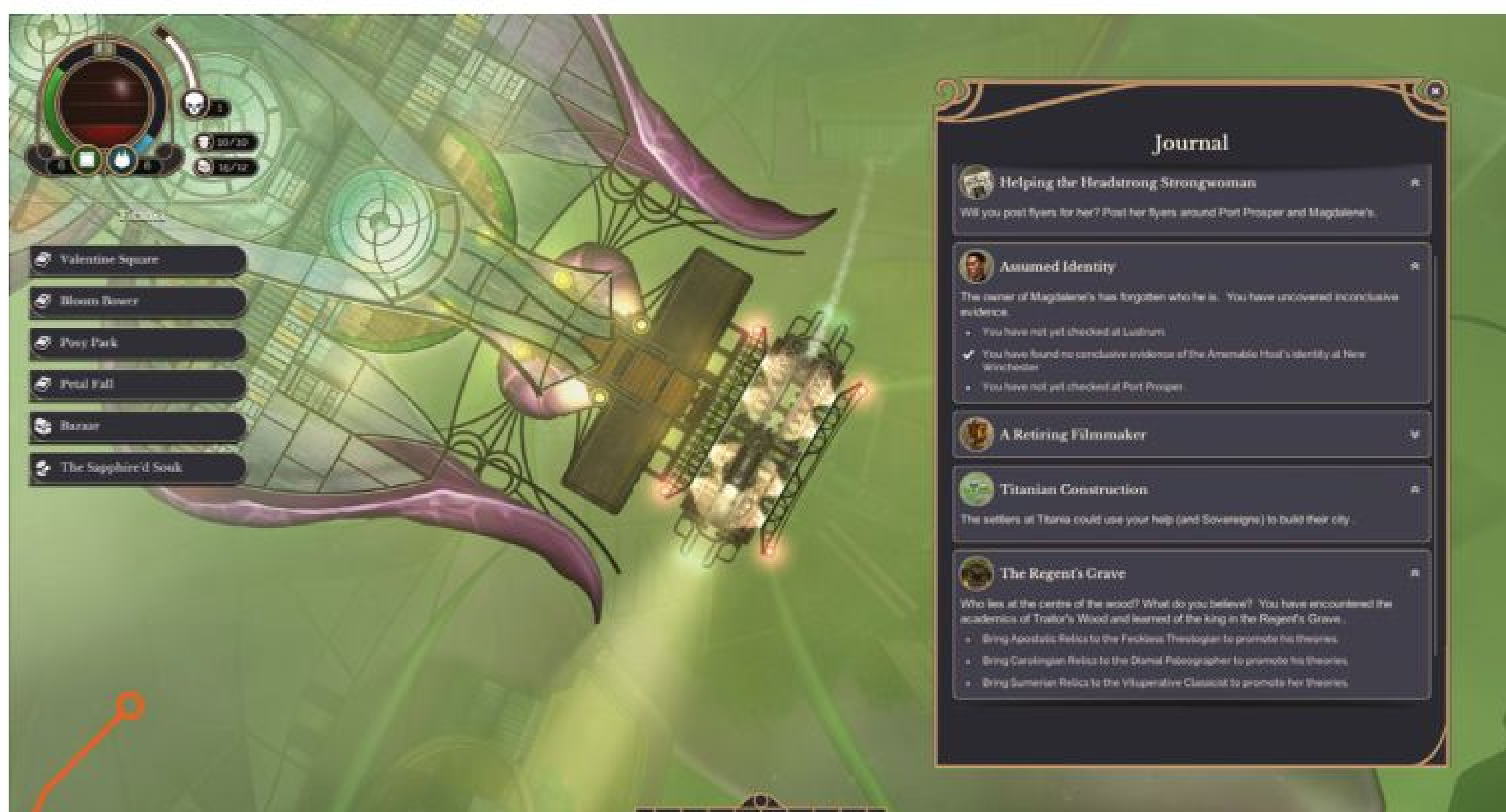
THRILL-O-METER

1 2 3 **4** 5

We can't wait to see which London landmarks get into the full game.







The settlement of Titania, built on a giant plant, is looking for money to grow. At least they're not asking us to haul them a city's worth of fertiliser.


Combat with other airborne locomotives is a good way to gain cargo – or to lose your life. Who knew steam trains could be so demanding to drive?

Format PC **Publisher** Devolver Digital
Developer Sectordub **ETA** Winter

PIKUNIKU

Take a wee snikupiku at this

At first glance, this surreal title is just another minimalist platformer, populated with bouncing, colourful shapes. But look below the surface and you'll find there's far more to Pikuniku. It's a game of countless bizarre layers, like some sort of mutant onion.

You (and a friend if you choose) play as a small red blob named The Beast, who awakes in a cave and is guided to the outside world by a friendly ghost. There the local folk are surprised at how decidedly not monstrous The Beast is and exploit you... er, that is, enlist you in cleaning up their mess. It's a humble start but don't let the cutesy visuals trick you, because from there things slowly grow into a strange tale about capitalism and deep state conspiracies. Yes, really.



Beast mode

The colourful, simple visuals are a great juxtaposition against the twisted plot, though, and sell the absurdity of it all perfectly. Thanks to the physics-driven animation, the wiggly movement of The Beast's legs as they wobble their way across all sorts of terrain makes the platforming both delightful and pleasingly easy to read. If there's something your little red blob can't do it's immediately apparent – no guesswork required. It's a pretty stress-free platformer but not because it's devoid of challenge . Rather, that visual clarity ensures you're never butting your head against a wall that you shouldn't be, or approaching things in the wrong way.

The actions you can perform are great fun, too. You can draw your legs up into your body, enabling you to squirm through tunnels like a bouncing bean. Or kick doors open with a satisfying thud, your big stretchy legs firing out like battering rams. Play with a friend and you'll be pushing buttons for each other to reach platforms and cross obstacles.

There's a whiff of Beautiful Katamari to what we've seen of Pikuniku so far, but it's not quite *that* bizarre. It just delves into deeper themes using a similarly surreal visual style. There are no giant, rolling balls of stuff though. Not in the bit we play, at least.

Pikuniku's bizarre mix of cutesy visuals and absurd, atypical themes has expertly raised our curiosity. Strange it may be, but it made us smile and we can't wait to unleash The Beast for ourselves. ■ ***Sam Greer***



There's more than cuteness to the world of Pikuniku. This entrepreneur is weirdly sinister.

GM Instant Reaction

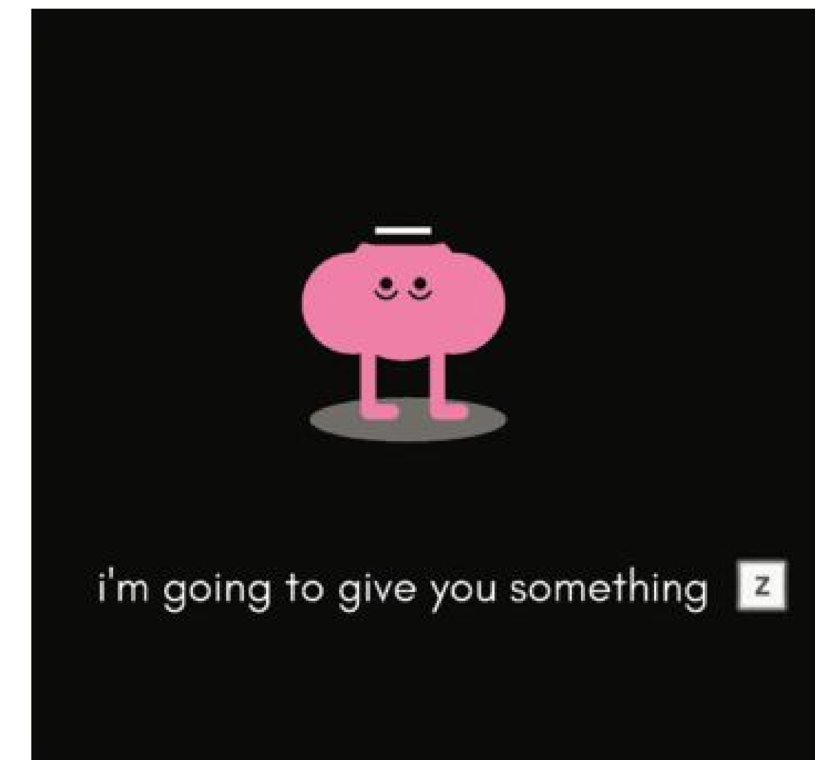
+ Colourful and delightful, but with a weird plot bubbling away underneath that draws us in completely.

+ Easy-going platforming. It's challenging enough to be engaging, but ultimately enjoyably stress free.

THRILL-O-METER

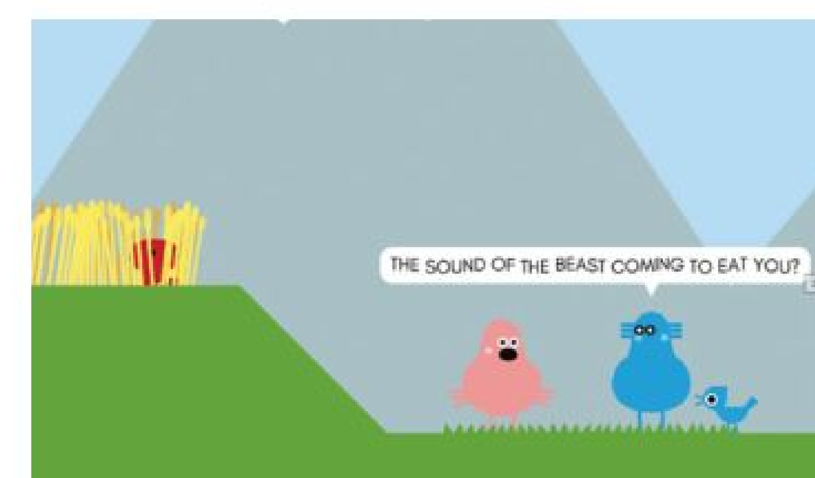
1 2 3 **4** 5

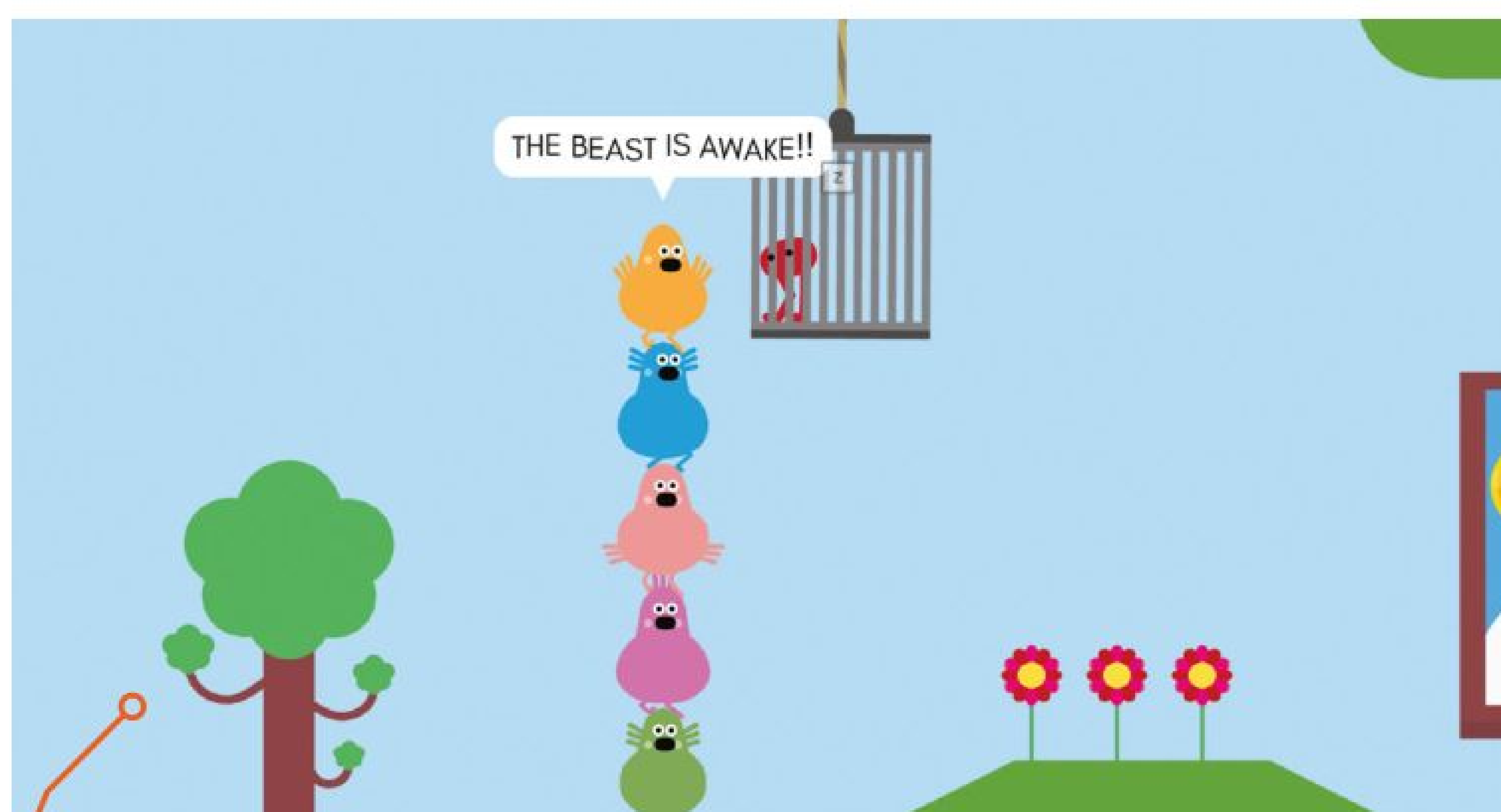
A strange little game, but one full of great surprises.



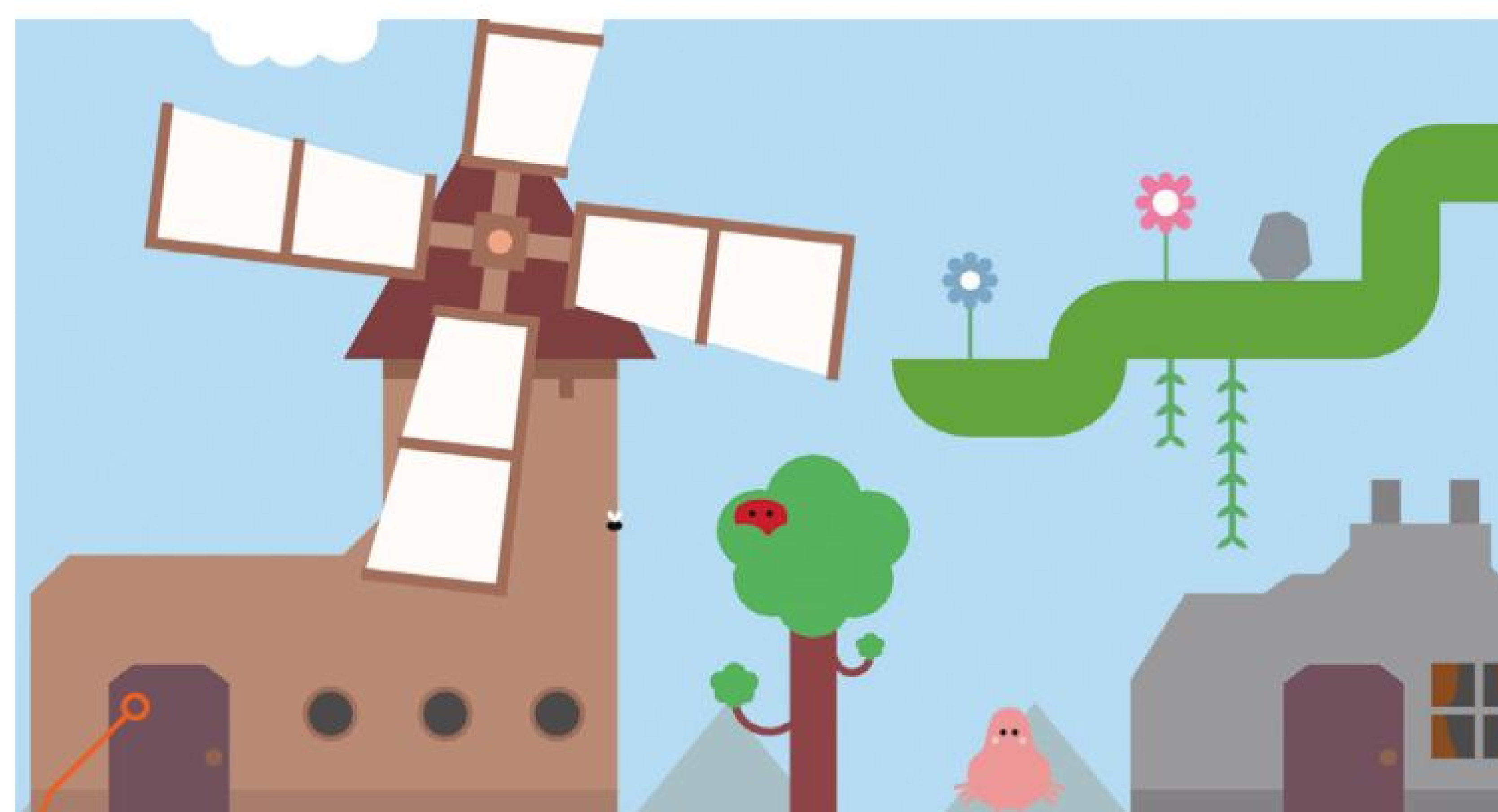








The townsfolk are ultimately a bit disappointed with the fabled Beast. And then proceed to set you to work, the exploitative sods.



Don't forget to explore beyond ground level. There's plenty hanging overhead for you to have fun with – if you can work out how to reach it.



Format XO, PC **Publisher** Capybara Games **Developer** Capybara Games **ETA** Winter

BELOW

An adventure with real depth

Long development periods can often spell trouble for games. Many titles come out the other end a shadow of what was promised. Below has been in the making for five years – that's a lengthy project for any studio but truly a gigantic task for a small one such as Capybara Games. In the case of the mysterious Below, though, time doesn't seem to have tarnished it at all. If anything, from our time with it, it's made the game all the better.

It's an action-RPG with survival and roguelike elements. You must collect resources to feed your adventurer as you navigate randomly generated areas, and your progress is dependent on your survival, with permadeath an ever-present threat. 'Harsh but fair' is what the developers are aiming for.

You start on the shore of an island during a storm. Are you stranded, or did you come here by choice? Wandering to the top of the cliffs that make up the surface you find a stone structure, a dark entrance that leads under the island. Your cute little character looks minuscule standing in front of it. It's a perfectly ominous start, immediately firing the imagination. Down there are caverns full of winding paths, obstacles, and enemies. With melee combat and survival mechanics, it at first looks like familiar territory – just another procedurally-generated RPG dungeon to battle through, right?

Yet Below feels quite different, something special in its own right. Though Capybara Games has created several games in various genres since its breakout title Superbrothers: Sword & Sworcery, Below feels like the successor to that stylish adventure. Musician Jim Guthrie, who composed the soundtrack to S:S&S is collaborating to provide the already hugely atmospheric soundtrack, but the similarities actually go much further than that.

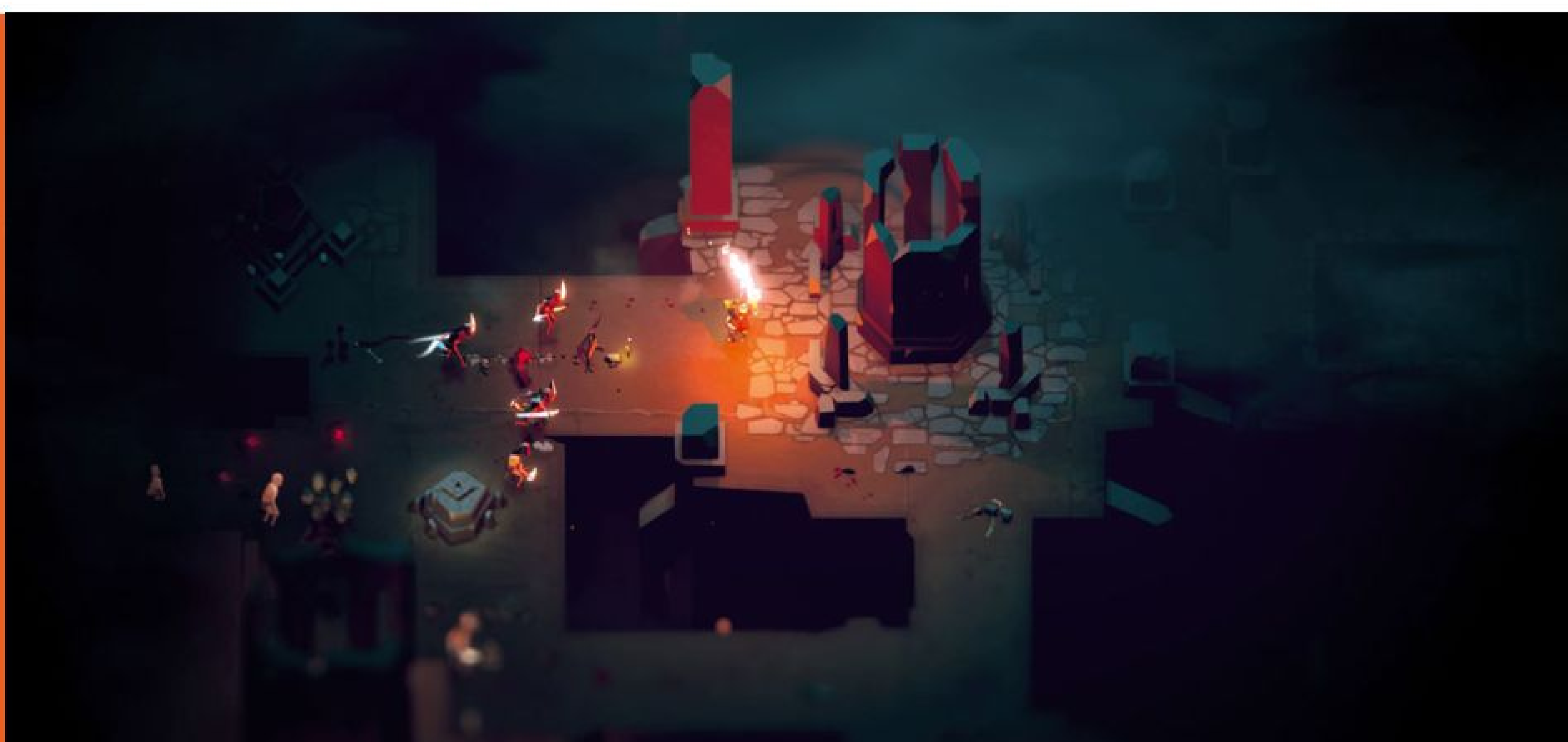
Dungeon faller

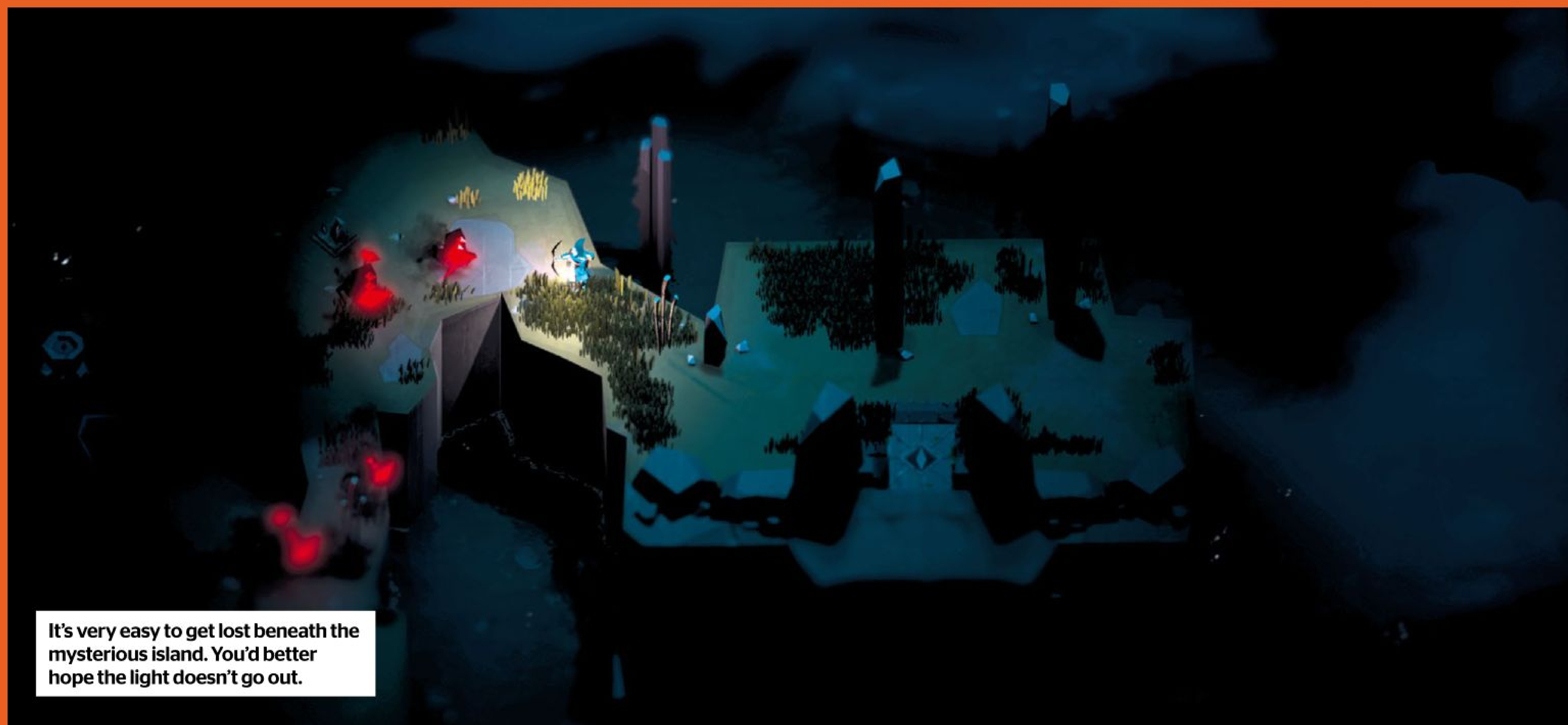
While Below is more mechanically deep than Superbrothers, with more fleshed-out combat and a full inventory, it shares many of the same special ingredients. It's partly down to the sound and visuals, which make it all so immersive. The sound especially is incredible: rain and wind, footsteps on

> **"BELOW ISN'T AN INNOVATIVE GAME BUT IT NONETHELESS FEELS GROUNDBREAKING"**



The visuals have changed since the initial announcement five years ago, with the game now darker than ever.





It's very easy to get lost beneath the mysterious island. You'd better hope the light doesn't go out.

stone, all authentic enough to suck you right into the game. Close your eyes and you're still in Below's depths hours later. The art style is a treat too, with its endless shadow and swirling fog, but it's the perspective that makes it all work. A tilted camera angle emphasises your descent, making every staircase look terrifyingly steep. There's also no HUD, so everything is communicated in-world. Below wants you to be lost in that space, to engage with it directly with as few menus as possible. Without distractions or barriers, the experience of exploring Below is extremely compelling.

Below isn't as humorous as Superbrothers, though, so don't expect off-beat characters to make an appearance and lighten the adventure (though we still hope a guitar-playing Guthrie pops up again somewhere). In the caverns of the island you are very much alone. Below's world is foreboding, full of mystery and danger. Capybara Games has nailed the feel of an adventure into the unknown, where each discovery feels like a significant part and not a perfunctory stop on the way to other things. Even the first deadly inhabitants you encounter only add to the mystery; they're not skeletons or goblins, but strange red wisps that charge on sight, a decidedly more surreal, alien enemy than is the norm. We're still wondering what that's all about.



Dark holes

In that deep, dark world you'll be venturing between campsites (your save points, where you can cook food using different recipes to restore hunger and health). They're quite cosy, those little spots, which naturally remind us of Dark Souls' famous bonfires, your only refuge in a lethal world, though with a little tent and cooking pot they're just more homely than the sword-in-ash checkpoints. But the sense that something is lurking just beyond the light of your little fire looms...

To make it to the next campsite you'll be seeking items to open up the world or help you navigate its treacherous depths. None of them come with a description of their function beyond a name, so you've some discovering to do. We love how you can see your backpack filling up with items too – no bottomless bags for this adventurer. It helps make your hero seem real and vulnerable, their backpack clanking full of objects, in a way few videogame characters feel.

There are different weapons to help you fight your way through, but Below avoids the trap of stats fiddling and instead gives weapons meaningfully different uses. Your sword is quick and comes with a shield, but the spear gives you reach. It all feels good and hefty, something tricky to pull off when the camera is so far from the action. None of that's new or novel, but in the context of a game that makes every discovery special and each step along the path a significant challenge, those elements become all the more meaningful.

Below's ideas aren't so new really, but it nonetheless feels groundbreaking. It strips away the flab of bloated RPGs and delivers a lean RPG that's just all the good bits. A proper adventure, with a real sense of mystery. It's so refreshing to play something that feels like it exists in its own little bubble, completely detached from all the trends of modern RPGs.

We came away from Below feeling refreshed. This is something cool and unique in unexpected ways. Our next adventure Below cannot come soon enough. ■ ***Sam Greer***

GM Instant Reaction

+ Sights and sounds are utterly engrossing, and they combine to create an incredible, unnerving atmosphere.

+ The mysterious world draws you in, and loads of exciting secrets to discover keep you exploring, searching for more.

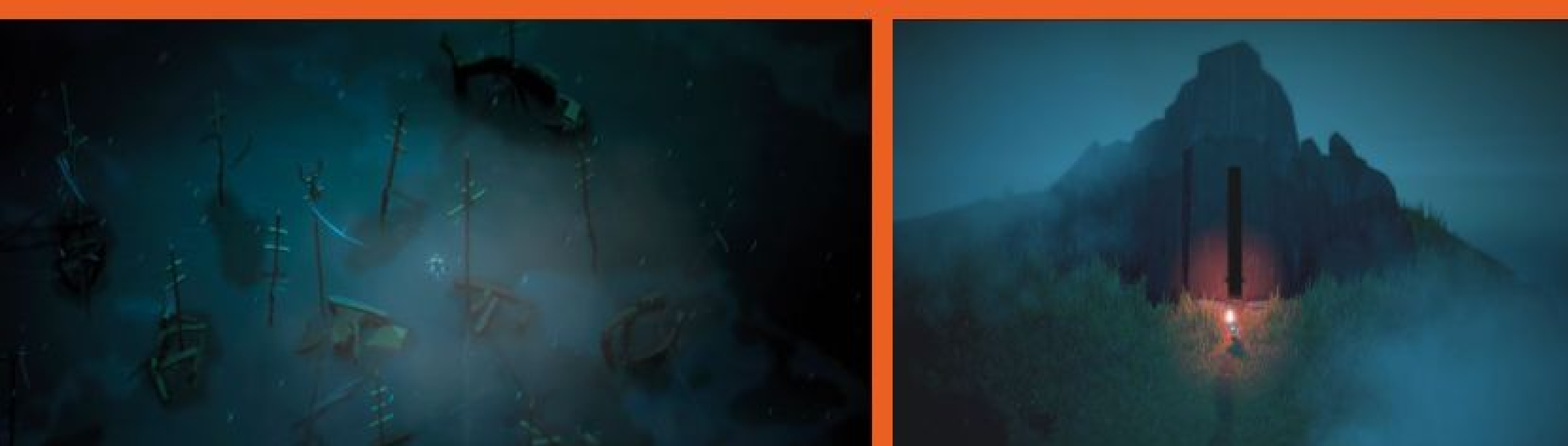
THRILL-O-METER



Wonderfully crafted – it's destined to rise above the competition.

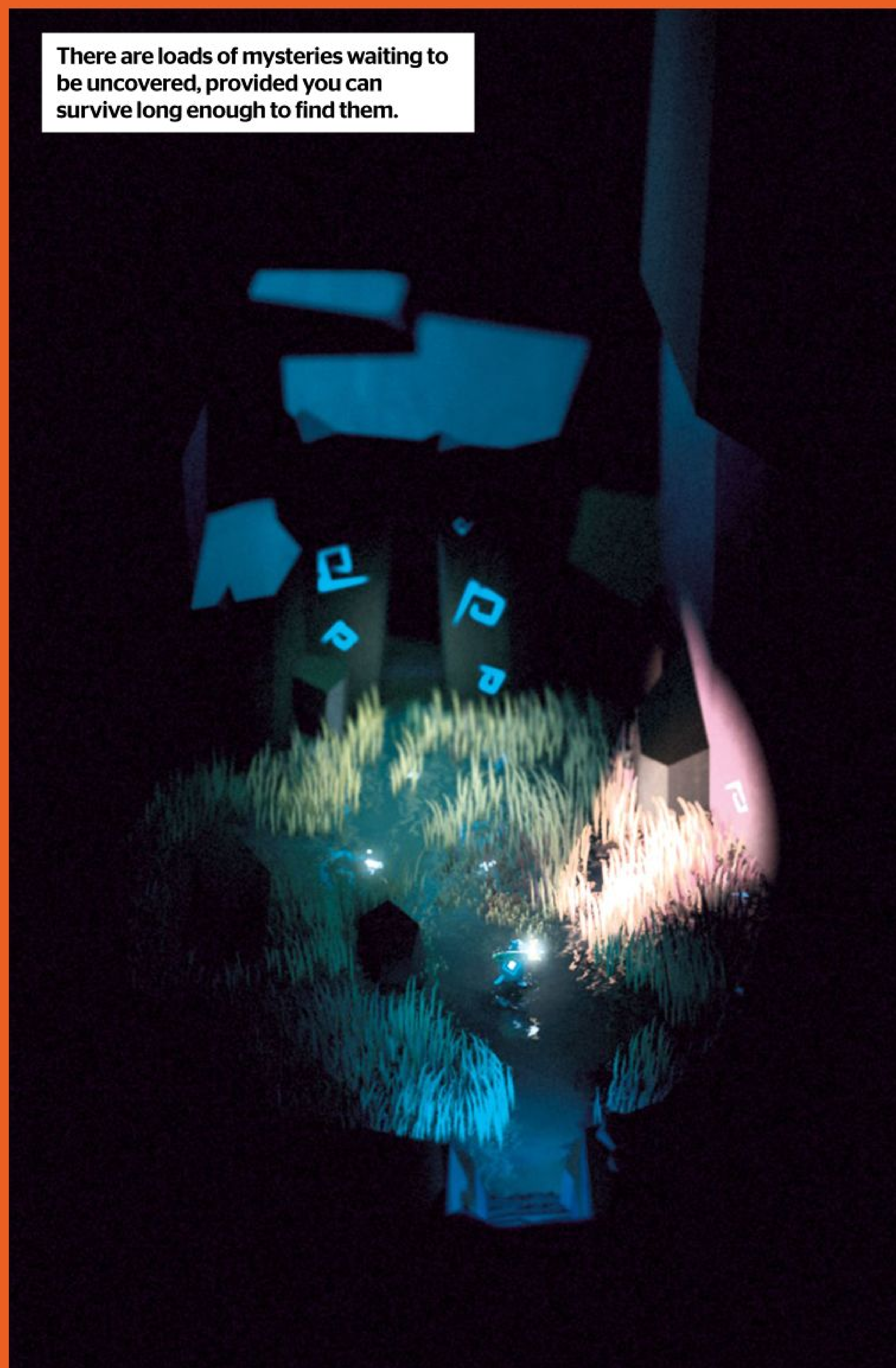








Crafting is a vital mechanic for keeping your little adventurer alive in this underground world – and naturally, death means losing everything.



There are loads of mysteries waiting to be uncovered, provided you can survive long enough to find them.


Everything and anything will go wrong. Make sure you remember where you left the fire extinguisher.

Format Switch, PS4, XO, PC **Developer** Inertia Game Studios
Publisher Inertia Game Studios **ETA** Autumn

CATASTRONAUTS

Star wreck: into larkness

Overcooked in space. FTL with multiplayer. Summing up a game in elevator pitches can easily be condemning, but in Catastronauts' case it perfectly encapsulates how simple the concept is to understand and just what ingredients it brings together. More importantly, if either of those premises don't sound enjoyable as heck then we can't help you.



Catastronauts is a four-player co-operative title in which players must work together to keep their ship in one piece as it does battle with an enemy vessel. There are fires to put out, repairs to be done, and someone needs to arm the cannons! Phew. It's a lot, and there aren't always enough tools for the job. Then there are levels with special modifiers, such as one where a solar flare cooks up at random, forcing you all to seek shelter in a special room or get crisped.



Dramatic flare

In an environment as chaotic as this the game has to communicate very clearly what's required, and Catastronauts excels at this. Big, easy-to-spot objects, clear buttons, and distinctive characters ensure mayhem may ensue but the screen is not impossible to parse. Things are always on the brink of catastrophe but it never feels completely unmanageable. The game walks a fine line, but the result is so much fun to play with friends. We often find ourselves on the verge of panic but never outright shouting or screaming. There's just enough pressure to keep us engaged and encourage us to communicate without ever tipping over into frustration. Don't expect this game to destroy any relationships.

Catastronauts looks poised to be your next local co-op obsession. It's not quite the game changer Overcooked felt like, but it's every bit as enjoyable to play. We can't wait to spend our office lunch times utterly failing to keep our ship in one piece. ■ *Sam Greer*



GM Instant Reaction

+ Chaotic team action that manages to avoid outright frustration. There's no risk of ruining friendships, either!

– It's not as fresh as Overcooked; the idea of working together under pressure will be familiar.

THRILL-O-METER

1 2 3 **4** 5

Small-scale co-op joy for friends and family. It's looking a laugh.



When the solar flare approaches your beleaguered spacecraft, you'd all better get inside the special shelter or you'll end up... overcooked.



The developer calls the world of Steel Rats 'dieselpunk' – an alternate version of the 1920s-40s with crazy tech.

Format PS4, XO, PC **Publisher** Tate Multimedia
Developer Tate Multimedia **ETA** Autumn

STEEL RATS

Sworn enemies of the biker mice

While a developer's natural instinct when conceiving a game about bikers who take on a horde of dangerous robots in an alternate 1940s America might be to make it a fully 3D racing title or similar, Tate Multimedia instead opted to create a side-scroller. An odd choice? Perhaps. But it's one that absolutely pays off in spades.



Steel Rats promises high-speed action, but to start with you'll be pretty slow as you stop and start, trying to master the controls. Thankfully it isn't a punishing game, and even when you start you'll be able to get through levels, you'll just do it at a crawl. The controls are odd but they certainly make sense.

Though it's a side-scroller Steel Rats doesn't just exist on a left-to-right plane; you change lanes on the road with a flick of the stick. Couple that with the ability to turn with the push of a button and you're soon chaining together stunts and attacks while weaving your wheelie way around obstacles.

Hot wheels

Your bike gives you some special abilities. Most importantly, you can turn the front wheel into a spinning ball of energy, which is useful for attacks and allows it to attach to metal surfaces, so you can ride up and down walls to cut through levels. This verticality makes Steel Rats feel distinct from other vehicle-based games.

This is a game of simple pleasures. Crash through robots, ride super fast, and look *really damn cool* doing it. We can't wait to rev up our engine for another go.

Sam Greer



GM Instant Reaction

+ Riding feels great – everything is responsive and fast. And those dieselpunk retro stylings are cool.

– The controls take a bit of learning, which makes for a slow start. You won't be roaring into action right away.

THRILL-O-METER



Fun and stylish, this is a fresh-feeling action side-scroller.

In any Lovecraft-inspired game you're sure to see more fog than clear blue skies. It's in the rules.

Format PS4, XO, PC **Publisher** Frogwares **Developer** Frogwares **ETA** Winter

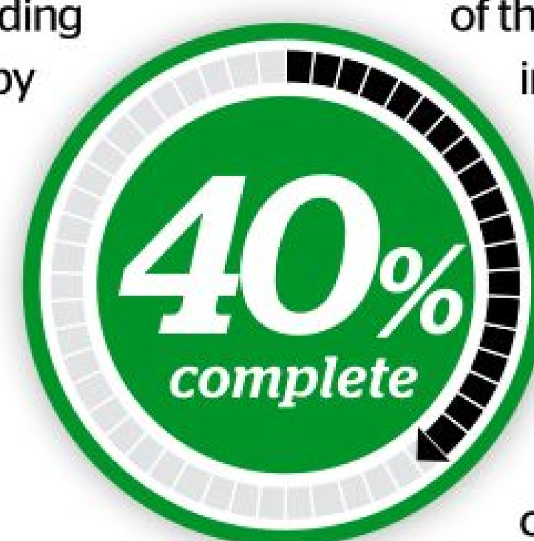
THE SINKING CITY

Something smells fishy

For a dude who wrote mostly about how hopeless everything is, Lovecraft has sure achieved some success, eh? Videogames of late, especially, have fallen for the horror writer's fiction, with his ideas and tentacled beasts making their way into everything from The Elder Scrolls to Bloodborne. Now The Sinking City wants to dip its toes into those monster-infested waters.

It's an open-world detective game set in the 1920s, in the city of Oakmont, New England, which was flooded many years previously. That flood brought with it many strange things, yet the inhabitants don't seem bothered at all by the appearance of monoliths or sea monsters. Cthulhu in the shed? This lot have got jobs to do mate. Speaking of which, main character Charles Reed is still operating as a private detective, completely unfazed by the slowly mutating populace or the fact he has to take a boat to work. Which is perfectly believable given the wooden voice acting of everyone around – they don't seem bothered by *anything*.

Reed's certainly got his work cut out for him. With murderous cultists, missing persons, and an ancient conspiracy, this detective has a lot on his plate, which is good for us players at least. In the section we play we're tasked with finding a missing husband, starting by interviewing his wife. Drawing on the developer's background creating Sherlock Holmes games, The Sinking City places a real emphasis on investigation, with minimum hand holding. If there's a place you need to go to, for instance, you won't be getting a waypoint. Instead you'll be told an address, and then have to look it up on your map. The woman mentions a street where her husband was last seen, so we head over in our rickety little boat to get on his trail. As we do we see slimy things moving about in the waters between old buildings.



Keeling time

We arrive at the location mentioned and find a crime scene. Things don't look good for the missing man, but this is where The Sinking City shines. The heart of this is the Case File, where all an investigation's clues are gathered for you to peruse. Witness statements, evidence, photographs: they're all there for you to arrange and make sense of on your own. While some clues and crime scenes will be highlighted, you'll have to identify and photograph others for yourself before they're added to your case file.

There's a brief interruption in the form of combat here, where hallucinations draw nasty, spider-like beasties into the





Forget cars or horses: you'll need a boat to travel around the city, which has never recovered from the devastating flood. Just keep an eye out, because there's something in the water...



The voice acting is pretty stiff in the demo we played. Here's hoping the final game's quality is better.



This is Charles Reed, the game's glum detective. Why the long face, Charles? Boats make you seasick or something?





world. It's functional but certainly a weak part of the game, and based on this we hope the final product doesn't have much in the way of shootouts. Soon enough, we go back to the investigation.

We gain a vital clue by noticing an occult symbol painted on the wall (in blood, of course) which makes us feel more involved than most games do when it comes to detective work. That arcane sign is something we can take to the library to find out more. Again, there's no hand holding so we're left to look through the big list of books and find the relevant topic for ourselves. From there we learn the symbol is popular among fishermen. That gives us another pointer, so it's off to the docks to see if anybody there knows anything.

This moment is, in our hands-on, where The Sinking City becomes most tantalising. Our investigation can branch in two directions. We follow the obvious clues, and the advice of the fishermen, (who are also literal fishmen – smello sailor!), only to be led into an ambush that leaves us at the hands of a cult, with repercussions to follow in the main story. However, if you're observant you can discover a few clues that allow you to catch out the fishermen and avoid the ambush, for a more successful result to your investigation, and presumably a less battered investigator.

At the moment The Sinking City's writing and voice acting are lacking – it's story's more than a bit dull – but the prospect of a open-world investigation game is appealing. You feel like a proper detective and it makes your interactions with the world, regardless of the story and characters, rewarding. If the final game can deliver on all that promise, it could be a splashing good time. ■ ***Sam Greer***

GM Instant Reaction

+ Really captures the feel of handling your own investigation, including letting you make mistakes.

– The characters and story are pretty weak, with wooden voice acting from most performers not helping matters.

THRILL-O-METER

1 2 **3** 4 5

Promising, but we're not sure if it'll sink or swim.

"WITH MURDEROUS CULTISTS, MISSING PERSONS AND AN ANCIENT CONSPIRACY, THIS DETECTIVE HAS A LOT ON HIS PLATE"



Blast through the ceiling and you can bring that fire or water tumbling down on foes. Or yourself.





Format PC **Publisher** Nolla Games
Developer Nolla Games **ETA** Autumn

NOITA

A roguelite for anyone who ever wanted to watch the whole world burn

Five minutes into our time with Noita, three things become abundantly clear. One: the game's lighting and pixel art style is gorgeous. Two: controls are snappy and responsive. And three: everything – and we mean *everything* – wants you dead; even your own weapons will do you in if you aren't careful.



This magical action-roguelite comes from the creators of Crayon Physics Deluxe and The Swapper, but here ditches colourful puzzles and cloning devices for a set of magic wands and a barrage of brutality, courtesy of the many nasties lurking around the shadowy, procedurally generated environments.

Speaking of environments, every pixel in them will react to what you do. This allows each dank area you traverse to become a destructible playground. So if you think that a sturdy ledge or a wall will keep you safe, then you've got another think coming.

Baptism of fire

Noita is an unforgiving game, but the nature of the world does help you (and a friend in local co-op) out in a plethora of unique and deadly ways. For example, igniting a barrel of radioactive sludge and tumbling it into a gaggle of ghouls results in a fiery green explosion big enough to rival the Battle Of Blackwater, while breaking a lantern above a support beam showers enemies below in a blazing inferno. If environmental hazards aren't your thing, then you can customise the magic in your wands to create spells that can freeze, melt, or even evaporate your foes. Variety truly is the spice of strife.

The chaotic battles and volatile landscapes have us hooked from the first destructible pixel. Looking for a challenge? Then this is definitely one to keep on your radar. ■ ***Corey Gittins***

GM Instant Reaction

+ Burning everything in sight never looked better – we want to torch things just for a look at the lighting effects.

– Places to heal are often too few and far between, making death all the more frustrating, as well as inevitable.

THRILL-O-METER



A roguelite that casts a spell of complete carnage.



Format Switch, PS4, XO, PC **Pub** Studio Evil **Dev** Studio Evil **ETA** Summer

SUPER CANE MAGIC ZERO

From the mind of Italian animator Sio (of 'Learn To Count With John The Toilet' fame. No?) comes an RPG where… well, nothing makes sense. Steeped in his random style of humour, how much you get out of Super Cane Magic Zero will depend on how funny you find, for example, the phrase 'bacon explosion'. It misses more than it hits for us, though the action is agreeably chaotic, especially in co-op, with the fun twist that you can pick up and either throw or eat almost any object. ■ ***Robin Valentine***



Format PS4, XO, PC **Pub** Starbreeze/505 Games **Dev** Overkill **ETA** Winter

OVERKILL'S THE WALKING DEAD

It was starting to look like the secrecy would last as long as Robert Kirkman's comic series, but Overkill has finally started to spill its guts. We knew it was being designed as a co-op FPS for up to four people. What's perhaps surprising is the importance placed on story, which is set to be central to the experience. Speaking to our GamesRadar cousins, Overkill repeats the questions "What did the government do? What happened to the military?" hinting that its game will explore these issues. ■ ***Luke Kemp***



Format PC **Pub** Humble Bundle **Dev** ZA/UM **ETA** Winter

DISCO ELYSIUM

Otherwise known as The Game Formerly Known As No Truce With The Furies. Or 'squiggle'. Maybe. Anyway, what we have here is a police story with a real difference. For one thing, exactly what kind of cop you are, we're promised, really *is* your decision. Through a combination of character building and decision making, just how effective, brave, focussed, and/or randy the character will be up to you. A police RPG with a huge number of ways to approach and solve the case? Sounds worthy of investigation to us. ■ ***Luke Kemp***



Format Switch, PS4, XO, PC **Pub** Warner Bros **Dev** Traveller's Tales **ETA** 13 July

LEGO THE INCREDIBLES

This latest blocky adventure will let you play through the events of both the original film and the new sequel, with all the brick-stacking, character-switching, and puzzle-solving you'd expect. And when you're not making your way through the story, you'll be free to explore the open world city and battle with supervillains for control of each district, as well as customise your character's appearance and powers to your liking. Next issue we'll have a full hands-on and interviews with the team – don't miss it! ■ ***Robin Valentine***



Format PS4 **Pub** Sony **Dev** Insomniac Games **ETA** 7 September

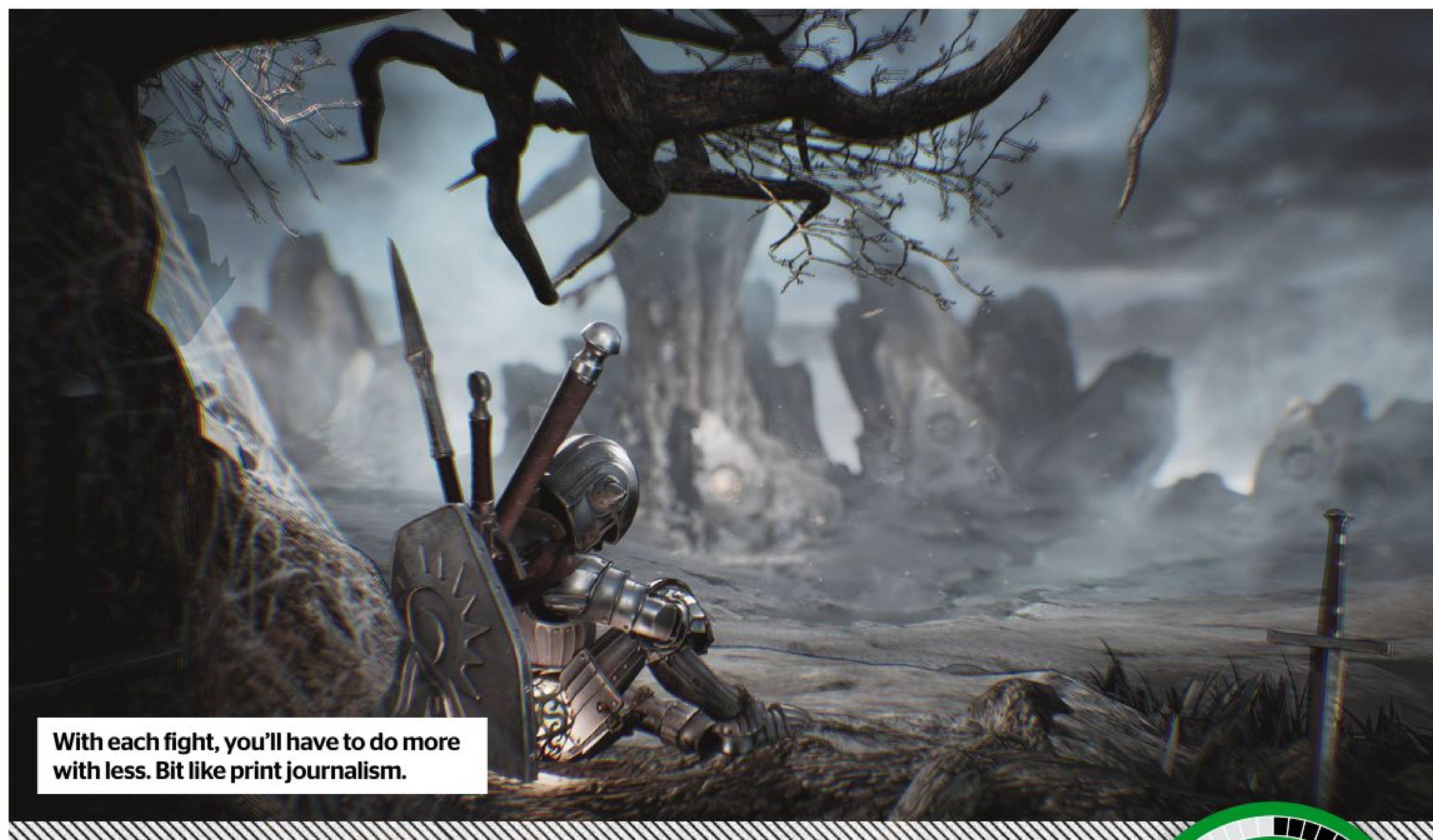
SPIDER-MAN

Venom nom nom

You're excited for this game, aren't you? It's okay, don't be shy; we all are. More details of Arachnid-Chap's new adventure are slowly but surely creeping out, including the fact that he is to be played by Yuri Lowenthal (the voice actor who's also played, among countless others, Prince Of Persia in Sands Of Time, Alucard in Castlevania, and Sasuke in the Naruto anime). And we've seen a nice chunk of gameplay too.

Have you seen Infinity War at the talkies yet? If so, you've seen Spider-Man in a particularly natty high-tech suit. Pre-ordering the game nabs you a pack of three for his PS4 incarnation to wear, including that one, meaning it should be available to everybody eventually. More importantly, the web swinging looks pretty darn cool. The speed and angle of your swing is determined by momentum and when you release the line. Hit a building mid-swing? You won't stop moving; you'll run up it (or across, if you prefer). Extra-hairy legs remain unconfirmed. ■ ***Luke Kemp***

GM Instant Reaction
THRILL-O-METER 1 2 3 4 5
Looks unlikely to be Peter panned.



With each fight, you'll have to do more with less. Bit like print journalism.



Format PS4, XO, PC **Publisher** Another Indie **Developer** Dark Star **ETA** Autumn

SINNER: SACRIFICE FOR REDEMPTION

Sin when you're winning

There's no shortage of Dark Souls clones out there but while most go bigger, Sinner aims to be more compact. This takes the brutal combat and twisted creatures of those games but uses them for an elaborate boss rush.

In a dark grey world you must use shrines to activate battles with various foes, each one a tough-as-nails encounter that would feel right at home in any of From Software's works. The twist is that the fights can be tackled in any order *but* with each fight you'll get weaker, with less health and stamina. Yes, in contrast to almost every RPG ever you're strongest at the beginning of the game and each victory is only going to diminish you, meaning you'll have to consider carefully which order you want to tackle these bosses in. Figuring out who you find toughest is going to be vital in planning your battles.

Combat itself will be familiar to any Souls fan – you'll be dishing out weighty combos of light and heavy attacks, with health items that recharge between fights. However, from what we've seen so far it's not nearly as tight as its inspirations, with controls feeling a bit loose or unresponsive at times. While it would be unfair to expect a small studio to deliver something that feels as fluid and functional as Dark Souls, the game itself makes the comparison unavoidable. Here's hoping the central mechanic adds enough to ensure Sinner avoids the bonfire. ■ ***Sam Greer***

GM Instant Reaction
THRILL-O-METER 1 2 3 4 5
Will its reverse-RPG twist be enough?

LAST MAN



THE OTHER TITLES IN THE MIX…

Battle royale gaming might still be in its infancy, but the well already runs deep. Outside the big three, Boss Key recently launched gaudy, '80s-themed Radical Heights in 'extreme Early Access' – aka it has 'lots of placeholder objects everywhere'. Surviv.io conveys all the tension and drama as a 2D top-down shooter, while SOS gives Twitch viewers something to do: vote on the items players come across – weapons or health packs if they like you, bombs if they don't.

The Darwin Project, currently in early access on PC and Xbox One, lets players track each other via footprints in the snow, telltale fires in the distance, and clues left after crafting items. Paladins and Dying Light are both getting in on the action with their spin on battles royale, and there are even a couple of promising VR projects: Pavlov VR and Stand Out: Battle Royale VR. Can any of them topple the big three? It's still the Wild West out there, so anything's possible.



STANDING

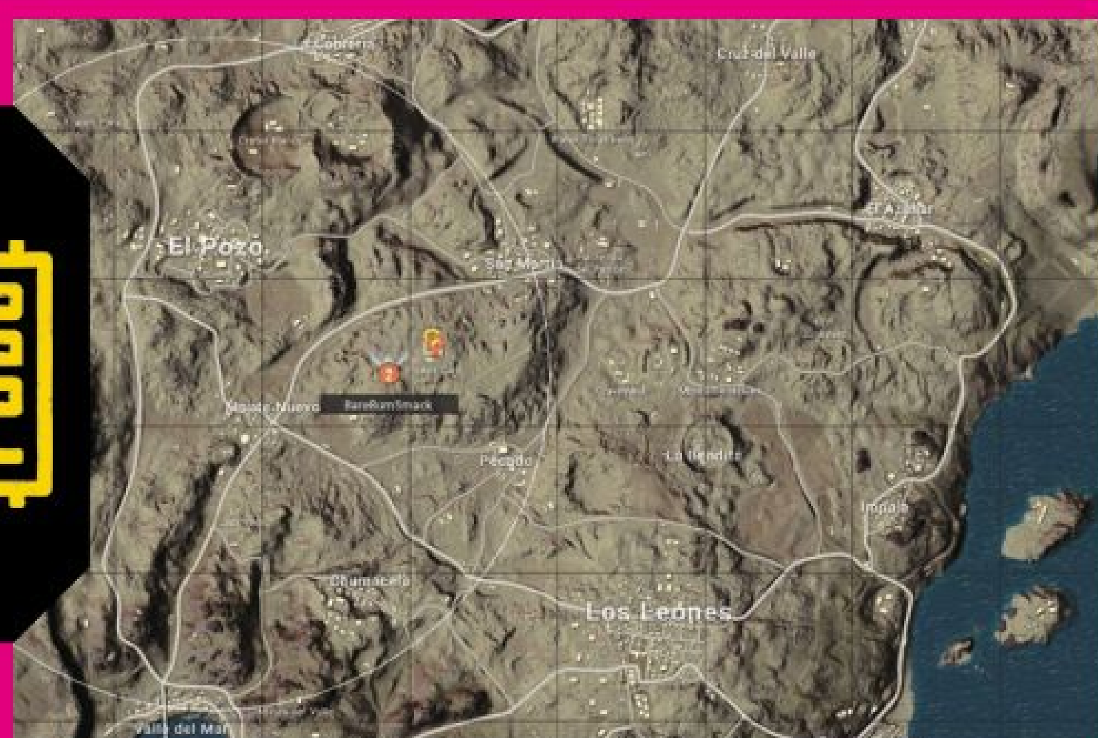
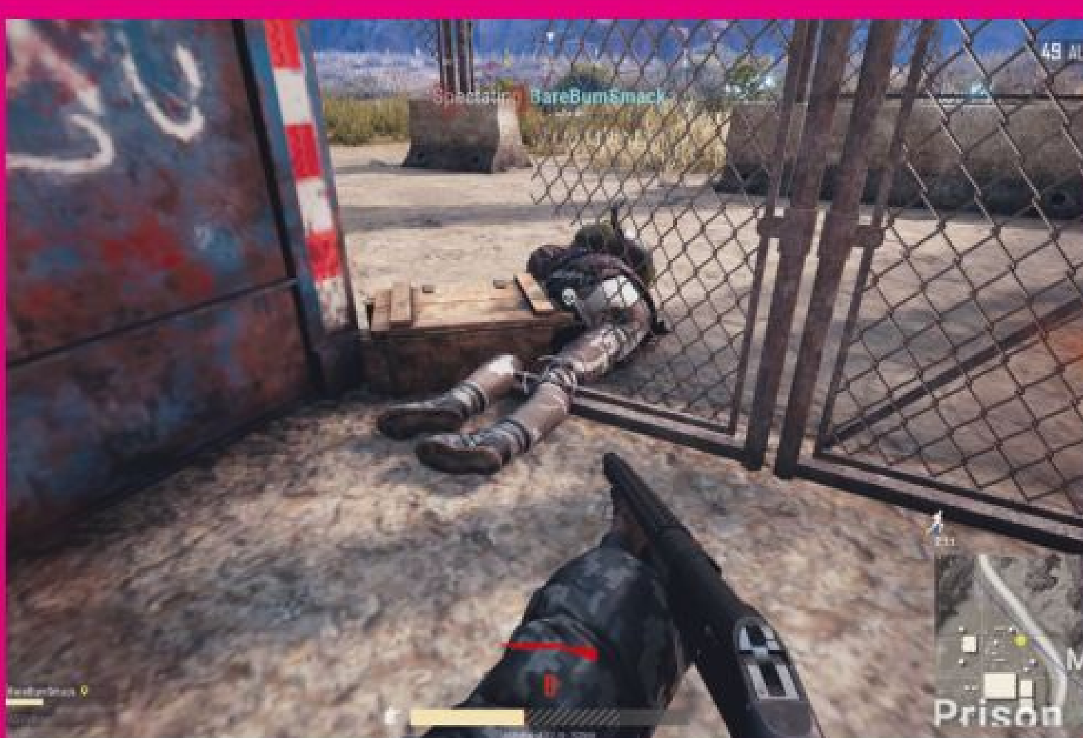
2018's best battle royale games go head-to-head

Do you know what the very best thing about gaming is? Correct: it's that moment when you walk out of the dark tunnel into the world at the beginning of Oblivion. But do you know the *second* best thing? It's the medium's ability to recalibrate according to changing tastes and trends, giving birth to new genres and experiences. Two years ago battle royale games were not, to use the vernacular of the time, a thing. Today it's the most popular genre in gaming.

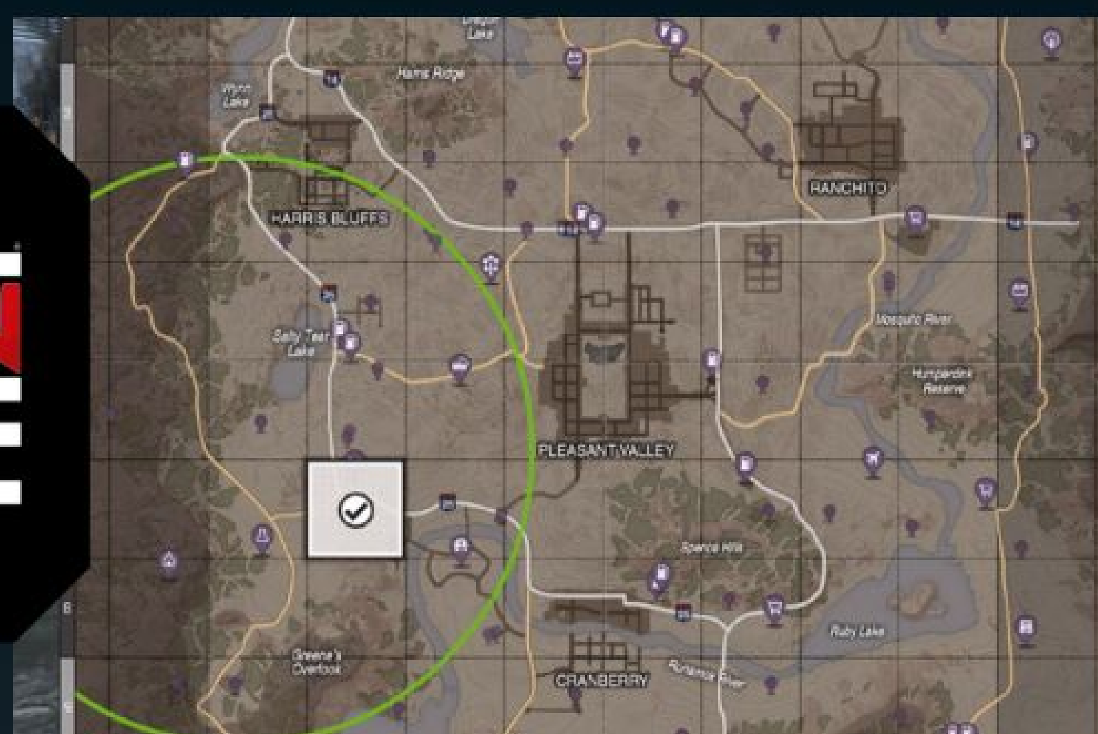
During that stratospheric rise, three giants emerged that would pull in players by the millions and draw fierce divisions between communities. PlayerUnknown's BattleGrounds is credited with popularising the genre, drawing in daily player counts of two million and, during its Early Access phase on PC, lighting the match that would ignite a revolution in multiplayer gaming. Fortnite, which began life as a very different online co-op game about fending off zombies, underwent a dramatic transformation by developer Epic and is now a full-blown phenomenon played by millions of battle royale fans. H1Z1, technically the oldest of the three, has struggled to keep its audience from wandering off towards its rivals, but has seen dramatic improvements to core gameplay in the run up to full release, including the innovative vehicular 'Auto Royale' mode.

The battle for supremacy could rage on between these three for months – maybe even years – to come. But there's no point dragging things out, so let's pit the trio against each other in a... battle royale for battle royale games, if you will. Which has the best world map? Which nails the feeling of headshotting an opponent? Which is the least tainted by loot boxes? It's time to find out as PUBG, Fortnite, and H1Z1 go at it.

PUBG

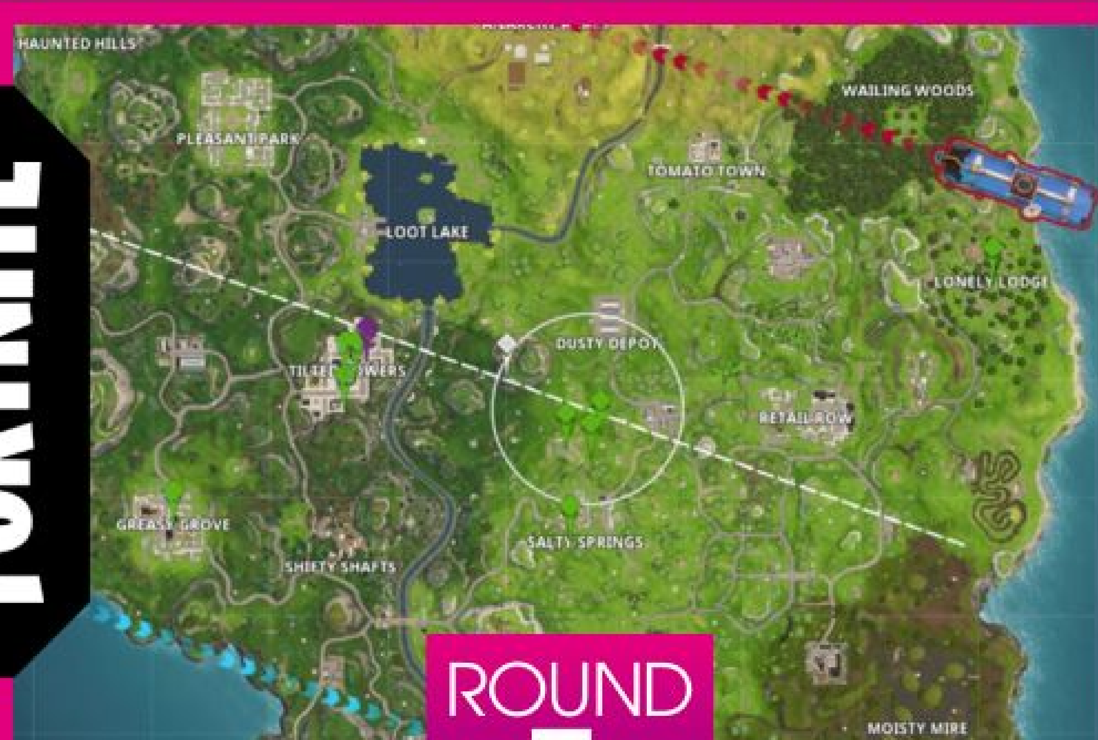




H1Z1





FORTNITE






ROUND 1 THE MAPS

With three of the biggest games in 2018 bundled into a figurative plane, the first battle they face is that of locations. While some in the genre use procedural maps, PUBG, Fortnite, and H1Z1 all use set ones. PUBG's Erangel and Miramar dwarf those of Fortnite and H1Z1, so it's off to a good start. Plus, it has two maps whereas the others have just one each – ouch, we're seeing light grazes on H1Z1 and Fortnite already.

Size isn't everything, though. It's what's contained within those square kilometres that counts, and it's here that the fight becomes closer. All three games go for an 'inexplicably abandoned rural town' vibe, with Fortnite opting to name all its locations after non-existent Mario Kart tracks. 'Flush Factory'? 'Greasy Grove'? *What?* The map gives the impression you're parachuting down to the set of Funhouse, but in reality it's the same deserted burgs as in the other games. With no vehicles in Fortnite it takes a long time to get anywhere, and the topography between building clusters isn't inspiring. Much the same can be said of H1Z1, although it can at least be traversed by several vehicle types. PUBG's sitting pretty this round: its underground passages, derelict ruins, quaint towns, and military bases are filled with character. Plus – stop us if we've already said this – *it has two maps.*

WINNER! PUBG

ROUND 2 THE LOOT

H1Z1 and Fortnite are licking their wounds, but if they can find a health pack they're still in the fight. Speaking of which – who wins the loot game? In PUBG you've no guarantee of a decent weapon after five minutes of scavenging, such is its restrained item spawn policy. It's frustrating to be mown down by an AKM-wielding foe (where did they find that scope in just 45 seconds?) but equally rewarding to find something of use. Because of that item scarcity, people gravitate towards certain high drop percentage areas, creating high risk/reward scenarios at the power plant, military base, and school.

The same's true of built-up areas in Fortnite, although you'll find a half-decent weapon in almost any building. It's less about sprinting around hopelessly with a pistol, and more about finding a better version of the assault rifle you already found. Introducing a colour-coded weapon hierarchy is a deft touch from Epic, and both PUBG and H1Z1 take a dint in their health bars as a result.

H1Z1 features varying weapon quality too, but the armoury itself is uninspired next to PUBG's quasi-Soviet arsenal. Fortnite's MMO loot, PUBG's realistic approach, and H1Z1's detailed but predictable weapons are in a deadlock. Everyone's been bloodied by this round, but there's no clear winner. The zone's shrinking, though…

WINNER! PUBG + H1Z1 + FORTNITE

ROUND 3 THE COMBAT

It's time for the warriors to whale on each other. Who wins? Well, combat's handled very differently by the three titles. Fortnite and H1Z1 opt for third-person gunfights, whereas PUBG allows third- *and* first-person shooting. In Fortnite that perspective is a necessity of its crafting interface – you need a wide field of view to place walls, so when you're not looking down a sniper scope, you're in over-the-shoulder cam. It's the same for H1Z1, albeit without the large-scale building element.

So does PUBG have the advantage? Yes and no. It's certainly easier to play when you can peek round corners in third-person and then go back to first-person for aiming. Count that as a few direct hits on its rivals, then – but only flesh wounds. Because PUBG can be clunky. Collision detection and camera head-bob have long been problems, and by contrast Fortnite and H1Z1 feel COD-level slick. Some retaliatory rounds fired into PUBG's squishy bits there.

But who's this storming in from the leftfield? H1Z1 finds a middle ground between Fortnite's lightweight gunplay and PUBG's clumsy simulation, delivering meaty weapon feedback over long and short range. It possesses the combat mechanics you can place the most trust in, and the sweetest headshot kills of the lot.

WINNER! H1Z1

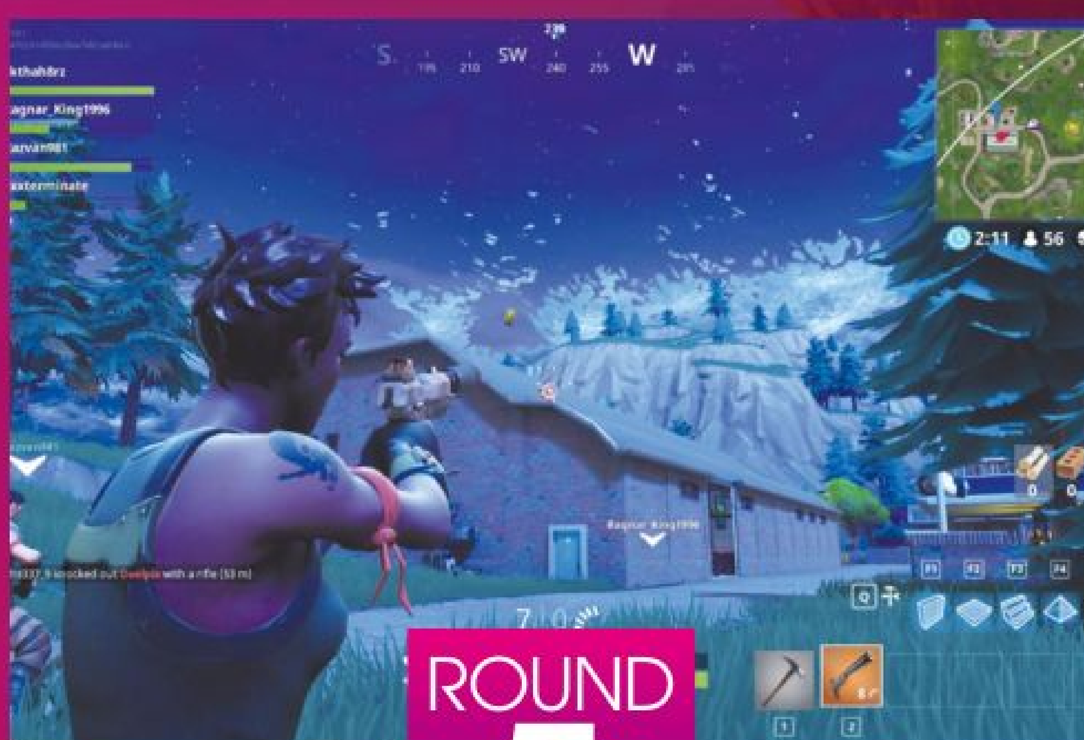












ROUND 4 THE LOLS

As the zone shrinks to a pinprick we come to the most important battle of all: who has the best hijinks? Battle royale games rose to their current heights off the back of Twitch viewers tuning in to watch streamers play them, and act all silly. Then there's co-op team play, in which you mess about over voice chat until a dot on the horizon prompts radio silence. Whether you're watching on Twitch or in-game spectator cam because you died, battle royale games should be great fun for an audience.

H1Z1 has player-friendly features such as a swappable shoulder cam, weapon crafting, and a generous helping of vehicles, but somehow it isn't as much fun to watch as it is to play. And Auto Royale mode, intended as a high-octane all-car spin on the formula, falls flat as a spectacle. You drive around a course, you meet another car, one of you blows up. End of.

No, this one's going to be fought between PUBG's player-baiting and Fortnite's madcap ingenuity. PUBG's community has dreamed up all kinds of dirty tricks, from playing dead next to a supply drop to littering houses with items so they appear unlooted. Comedy gold when unsuspecting players wander in. But the slapstick of Fortnite's 'you're shooting me so I'll build a giant staircase to escape up this cliff' crafting system wins out.

WINNER! FORTNITE

ROUND 5 THE END GAME

Sprinting towards the safe zone, the three games ready themselves for the end game. The odds are tipped evenly, and the winner will be decided according to how they draw each round to a close.

Genre-wide, flat finishes are a problem. The same thing happens in cup final football matches: with so much to play for, everyone's more concerned about not losing than with winning. Thus you often end up with the battle royale equivalent of a scoreless 90 minutes: ten people lying motionless in various bushes. PUBG and H1Z1 are equally guilty of this, bringing together those who've avoided detection all round and have yet to fire a bullet, and who'll be damned if they start now. It's rare that the conclusion has any real drama to it - often an unsighted sniper bullet concludes the match.

Fortnite is the exception. Its building system means that the closing minutes of a round are spent hastily erecting forts and luring other players out of theirs. There's still an element of camping, but with the destructible, rebuildable scenery involved it's a more dynamic situation. And that proves to be the killer blow. Congratulations to Fortnite! Flip to the next page for our interview with the triumphant victor.

OVERALL WINNER! FORTNITE

BACK TO WHERE IT ALL BEGAN

Let's start by stating the obvious: the name of the genre and many of its conventions date back to the 2000 movie Battle Royale, in which Japanese students endure a terrible school trip involving being made to hunt and kill each other on a remote and inescapable island. From this the location, the diminishing safe zone, and the concept of weapon foraging were inherited by the genre. See also: The Hunger Games.

AntVenom and SkyDoesMinecraft began running Minecraft servers based on the above movies in 2012, while at the same time modders were trying something similar with Arma 2 mod DayZ. One of those modders, Brendan 'PlayerUnknown' Greene developed a particularly popular mod called Battle Royale. He adapted it for Arma 3, then worked as a consultant on H1Z1 before eventually releasing PlayerUnknown's BattleGrounds in March 2017. Epic's Fortnite, in development six years before release in June 2017, cribbed the formula for a spin-off mode, and by delivering battle royale gaming to console gamers before anyone else, with its added crafting twist, found a massive audience.

H1Z1, meanwhile, which had begun in 2015 as a zombie survival experience similar to the original concept for Fortnite, split into two projects in 2016. Just Survive retained the original survival vision, while King Of The Kill offered the popular battle royale stylings. Leaving early access in March 2018, KOTK became simply H1Z1, and had lost its once-huge player counts to PUBG and Fortnite over the previous year. It's now the cheeky outsider looking to win back supremacy from PUBG Corporation and Epic.





A NITE TO REMEMBER

WE CHAT WITH FORTNITE'S DESIGN LEAD ERIC WILLIAMSON

GamesMaster: First of all, congratulations on how well the game is doing. Fortnite is officially GM's favourite battle royale game!

Eric Williamson: Thank you!

GM: How did the idea to create the battle royale spin-off mode come about?

EW: The Fortnite team had experimented with PvP modes a few times during the development and they were a lot of fun, but eventually they shifted focus on the PvE to make sure that was really solid coming into what would eventually become the paid Early Access period. Some time last year, the idea of bringing some kind of PvP back into the game came up again.

The team had been enjoying a lot of different types of last-man-standing games, and thought it might be a cool idea to experiment with that formula, but using the unique action-building elements that were already in Fortnite. We started that work in July and it showed very early on that there was promise, so we were really excited to get it out to players as soon as we could to start getting feedback.

GM: What expectations did you have for how popular the Battle Royale mode would be, and what the fan reaction would be?

EW: There weren't any real expectations... we'd hoped players would have fun, and we'd wanted to get feedback from them early so we could iterate on it and improve it if players enjoyed it.

GM: There are other battle royale games about, but Fortnite's the popular one. Why do you think it's been such a smash hit?

EW: This is hard question to answer, because there a lot of things at play. But we'd like to think that our guiding principle that 'fun' should drive our decisions -- whether we're talking about adding new weapons of gadgets, new skins, or new game modes -- has certainly helped.

GM: What's it been like behind the scenes dealing with such a huge spike in popularity?

EW: Well, we wanted feedback from players, and there's certainly no shortage of people telling us what's working, what isn't, and what they want more of. Of course, also making sure our servers can handle all of it has been a challenge, and we're making good progress on that.

GM: What are your plans for the future of Fortnite? Any additions?

EW: We have some cool surprises in store. We'll keep listening to players, updating the game and adding new items, limited time modes, and more.

GM: We're looking forward to them!



GET INVOLVED

SIGN UP TO THE



NEWSLETTER TODAY!



RECEIVE ALL THIS AND MORE!



 Behind the scenes news



 Awesome special offers



 Exclusive competitions

SIGN UP NOW!

bit.ly/gmnewsletter

PS4 Pro

ONLY ON P

DETROIT

BECOME HUMAN

25.05.18

HOW FAR WILL YOU GO TO BE FREE?

18
www.pegi.info

Detroit Become Human™ ©2018 Sony Interactive Entertainment Europe. Published by Sony Interactive Entertainment Europe. Developed by Quantic Dream. "Detroit Become Human" is a trademark of Sony Interactive Entertainment Europe. All rights reserved. "PS", "PlayStation" and "PS4" are registered trademarks of Sony Interactive Entertainment Inc. All rights reserved.


LAYSTATION

The backstory of Prey's space station can be seen in its design – the fact it was originally built in the 1960s is reflected in the retro-futuristic look, and the lush art deco architecture reflects the limitless resources poured into space travel in this world.

PERSONAL SPACE

IN APPRECIATION OF GAMING'S MOST IMMERSIVE SCI-FI SETTINGS

For as long as it has existed, humanity has cast its eyes towards the stars, imagining what worlds circle them. Similarly for as long as games have existed, developers have been endeavouring to bring those stars just a little closer, using ingenious and sometimes confounding feats of artistry to let us immerse ourselves in otherworldly locations that aren't anything like our own.

Science fiction is a popular toybox for the gaming industry to play in simply because of the exciting potential of the unknown. You don't have to stick to the rules when creating a fiction of your own, whether it's set in the near future or some time a little farther off. You can take known facts and cutting-edge theories and ask 'what if…' to your heart's content.

The thrill of discovery and excitement at unlimited possibility propels some of the hardest-working developers creating sci-fi games today. And one of the most vital aspects of their craft is the creation of convincing and compelling settings, from space stations, to cities, to planets, and even galaxies.

Space bound

"For me, I want to be transported somewhere," Ricardo Bare, lead designer on Arkane Studios' intergalactic immersive sim Prey tells us. "Somewhere I've never been before. And when I get there I want to have a feeling that

"EVEN THOUGH I KNOW IT'S LITERALLY NOT TRUE… I WANT TO FEEL LIKE IT COULD BE"

USG ISHIMURA
DEAD SPACE

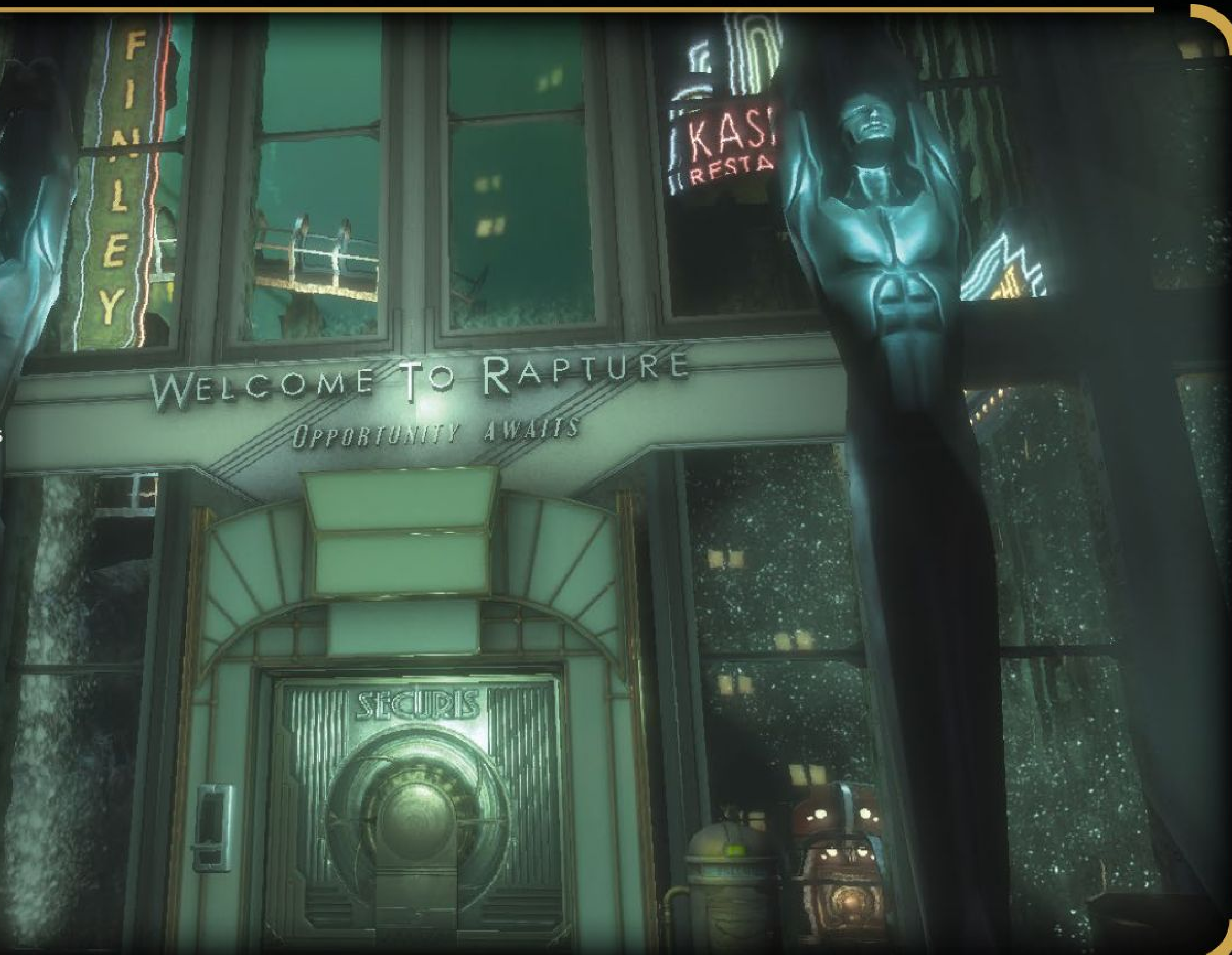
Isaac Clarke's slow decent into madness aboard the USG Ishimura is one of gaming's most memorable adventures – and the ship itself plays a huge role in that. The sole purpose of this intergalactic freighter is to crack open planets and mine them for resources. This notably bleak corner of the Dead Space universe might take a lot of cues from Ron Cobb's lived-in design for the Nostromo in the movie Alien, but it manages to create successful scares of its own thanks to the abundance of darkened corridors you're forced to traverse. There's no breathing room when you're aboard the Ishimura… especially when you consider what new alien nightmares await at the end of your next errand.


Everything in a location needs an apparent function, like the utility tunnel running through Talos 1.

anything is possible. Even though I know it's literally not true, when I'm playing a game I want it to feel like it could be." Set in an alternative timeline where JFK wasn't assassinated, allowing the USA's mid-century space program to accomplish its full potential, Prey's setting, the purpose-built space station Talos 1, certainly fulfils this immersive ambition.

Following one of the most mind-altering opening sequences to a game in recent memory, you step into the main lobby of Talos 1. "Ready for your first real view of the world?" asks January, your main contact throughout the adventure. However you respond, you're almost certainly not ready for what's coming. After escaping the horror that is the Typhon alien menace, you turn a corner and are greeted with an awe-inspiring


Details right down to the posters on the walls mattered to the Observer devs – the world was created in such a way that it could be expanded in future.



RAPTURE
BIOSHOCK

Andrew Ryan's idyllic utopia gone wrong is as iconic a sci-fi location as they come in the world of videogames. A submerged city originally intended to become a place for artists, philosophers, and scientists to escape the restrictions of post-WWII political restraints, there's a richness to Rapture that proves tough to replicate in other settings, even in 2018. Run-down areas such as Arcadia, Olympus Heights, and, of course, Sander Cohen's culture-filled Fort Frolic all tell their own unsettling stories almost through design alone, revealing more about the collapsed society. Bioshock is an underwater treasure trove of complex ideas, but this sense of coherence helps to ground you.



view of the Earth. In one simple moment, Arkane makes you realise your place in the universe. Suddenly, you feel as insignificant as an ant.

As stunningly fantastical and well-realised the visual design of Talos 1 is, however, for Ricardo the key to keeping players immersed is to construct a very plausible foundation which can then be iterated upon. "We wanted to make the space station one of the main characters. So, the key thing was for us to establish its history. Even if all that stuff doesn't make it into the game, it informs all the choices we make," he says. "We wanted to make sure that we went into detail about 'how did the station get built?' 'Who were the first people there?' Then those decisions get reflected in all the individual spaces you'll come across."

The necessity to retain a sense of reality within the fictional world isn't something exercised solely in sci-fi games developed at triple-A level. For Rafał Basaj, producer and brand manager on last year's ambitious psychological cyberpunk survival horror title Observer, this element is just as critical. The retro-futuristic, run-down Krakow apartment complex at the heart of the game feels real owing thanks to the game's willingness to reward player curiosity.

"We knew we had so much potential to expand the world. We actually wanted to build it to have options maybe to expand on it at some point in the future, or, if not, to fill it with enough detail to make the world more viable," explains Basaj. "…The world just kept building and building, and we wanted to push all of that into the game in various ways. The talks you have with the tenants. The emails you can find on PCs in the world. We just had so much of it that we wanted to use." Filling a contained setting with small nuggets of detail is an effective method of infusing believability into these far-off worlds, and most sci-fi games, Observer and Prey included, employ the technique regularly.



Observer's bleak environments convey the sense of a society falling apart at the seams.

"THE MOST MEMORABLE SETTINGS ARE THOSE YOU INTERACT WITH"

Lost in space

Interaction can go way beyond simply looking at things within the environment. The most memorable settings, like the most memorable characters, are those you interact with, making use of the carefully-placed details – though that can cause headaches for developers. "Having an enclosed space station, as with Talos 1, is actually easier for us in the sense that we don't have to care about where a player goes or what will happen if



PLANET ZEBES
SUPER METROID

That the atmosphere and mood of Zebes is still imprinted onto people's minds, even though we first touched down upon the planet in 1986, when polygons were a mere flicker in someone's eye, says a lot about Intelligent Systems' world-building artistry. While guiding Samus through the inner workings of the planet in the original Metroid had its charm, returning to the hostile location in Super Metroid saw it surpass any prior expectations we may have had. The otherworldly whirrs and bloops of the soundtrack, emboldened gloom of each zone, and ethereal Chozo imagery all combined to convincingly transport you to this isolated, volatile territory.

they jump out of the location," Bare tells us. "Because the player's in the box, it isn't such a worry."

This is particularly an asset in Prey, where the Gloo cannon actively encourages you to explore the station in creative ways. It's an item which makes sense both as a tool (functioning similar to Isaac Clarke's plasma cutter in Dead Space) and as a weapon. "There's a couple of ways it connected to the level design. It certainly encouraged level designers to place things and hide things in interesting vertical spaces. We accounted for instances like 'Hey, what if I made a Gloo ladder up here?'" says Bare. "Let's put something up here for players to find."

Setting stars

Successfully immersing players in a sci-fi setting, then, ultimately comes about as a result of a cohesive setting, complete with both a history and incidental details, plus that maintained illusion of limitless possibility. "You can't have an immersive sci-fi setting without a really robust back story, great characters, audio cues, music – it all has to work together and come together to this near-perfect spot," states Observer's Rafał Basaj.

Karen Segars, lead architect on Prey, agrees. "As clichéd as it is, make sure you have a bathroom," she jokes. "You want it to feel like a believable space, not just cool sci-fi elements all mushed together."

So many games now err towards scale over detail, crafting huge open worlds that, by their nature, paint with a broad brush. We just hope that narrative-driven sci-fi adventures like these, with their intricate, detailed settings, don't fade away. They bring something unique to gaming, fulfilling our basic desire to explore and ask questions, all while keeping things tightly-knit, personal, and surprisingly closer to home. ■



The interior design of Talos 1 takes inspiration from the real-world Viceroy New York Hotel, complete with mahogany wall panels and brass detailing.



Do It Yourself!

MAKING YOUR OWN GAME HAS NEVER BEEN EASIER

We're living in a golden age of indie titles. Every month, every *day*, exciting new titles are released covering every genre imaginable. Some of those have even been Game Of The Year contenders. Not bad for something developed in a bedroom. No, really, people in their bedrooms are making some of the biggest smash hits around. And here's the thing: if they can do it, why not you?

It's never been easier to get into game development. Various engines and tools, all relatively affordable or free, are available. If you've a passion for games, an idea you want to turn into something real, then we're here to help you find your feet. Plenty of people have already done it , and so can you. Making an entire game isn't easy but over the next few pages we're going to show you the best tools available so you can find out which is best for you and your project. So who knows? Maybe one day your game will feature in GamesMaster!

TWINE

Let's start with something nice and easy. Twine is a tool to make text-based games. Basic? Sure, but even with its simple options you can build engaging and clever games. The only skills you need are the ability to write and some patience. Some very basic coding is required as you'll need to format text so that it links to other pages and acts as a choice, but other than that it's super simple. The blueprint-style layout that maps out your interactive story is very intuitive to read and use – you'll pick it up in minutes.

Start by putting together a short story, maybe with one or two major choices and a few endings. Don't overdo it, see how you manage with your first project and let your ambition grow from there. Try to avoid making your first project a novel-sized bit of fiction. Maybe you think you can write something of that length, but if there are multiple choices involved, that size could easily double or triple. You also have to be aware of the player. Are they going to be able to sit through all this? Aim for something that takes a few minutes to play through (it's a lot more work than it sounds). Slowly grow the size of your projects once you have an understanding of what's involved. Overambition has been the death of many budding games!

Twine can only make text adventures, but practicing on it will give you a good idea of what game development is like. And while text adventures may look very basic, plenty of great and engaging games have been made with Twine. Fiction can be engaging in any form, after all, and some of the very first games ever made were text adventures – so it's a proud tradition!

DIFFICULTY
VERY EASY
WHERE
BIT.LY/GMTWINE
COST
FREE


MADE IN TWINE

~~1: Suggest a change of location and confide in her honestly.~~
~~2: Test the waters and open up a little, hoping she'll understand.~~
3: Insist that nothing is wrong and change the subject.
4: Defensively ask what she means by that.
5: Notice that your hands are shaking.

You are deeply depressed. Even activities you used to enjoy hold littl
no interest for you, and you exist in a near-constant state of lethargy

You are not currently seeing a therapist.

You are not currently taking medication for dep

DEPRESSION QUEST

RPG MAKER

If you're a fan of JRPG classics such as the older Final Fantasy titles or Chrono Trigger then this engine will allow you to make games in their vein very easily. The editor's interface has lots of options for those not proficient in coding, so you'll find it fairly easy to learn with no experience provided you're willing to delve into a little bit of scripting. While this is really only built to make one type of game, the luxury is it makes making that type of game as easy as can be. Even if this is your first attempt at development, RPG Maker will help you put together something very playable really quickly.

It comes with a load of its own art and audio so you won't need to create any of your own assets to be able to build something. Expansion packs for the editor also offer loads of different assets should you need something more suited to your game – though you do have to pay for those.

With a little creativity, though, you don't necessarily have to make an RPG full of turn-based battles. Narrative-focused titles such as To The Moon were made using RPG Maker, and it's possible to use the engine to make puzzles and cutscenes. Some developers have, with the help of plugins, even managed to make point-and-click adventure games.

The lesson to take away from RPG Maker is that all that matters is you use the engine that's right for you. You can then bend it to make the games you want. As with most tools, if you're willing to get creative you can use it to do so much more than you might at first imagine. And you can get started with our easy step-by-step guide over on p64 – perfect for building your confidence.

DIFFICULTY
VERY EASY
WHERE
BIT.LY/GMRPG
COST
£56
WITH EXTRA ASSETS AVAILABLE AS PAID EXPANSION PACKS


MADE IN RPG MAKER


TO THE MOON

GAMEMAKER

This is where accessibility and possibility combine nicely. GameMaker remains one of the easiest game engines to use, with an interface that allows you to put together games with no or very little coding. Basic functions such as player movement and AI pathfinding are pre-built into the engine, allowing you to focus on more complex or unique features for your game. With just a bit of patience and a few tutorials you can put together something simple in a matter of hours.

As easy as it is to put together a game without ever delving into coding, if you're willing to learn some programming then what you can build with GameMaker is truly astounding. You're limited to 2D visuals, but beyond that RPGs, shoot-'em-ups, platformers... they're all within your grasp. The coding for GameMaker is all in its own proprietary language so you'll have to learn the way it does things, but anyone who has dabbled in C+ or similar should find plenty that is familiar. GameMaker provides a strong foundation on which you can build your own code, but within a few weeks of using it, you'll probably find yourself never touching the pre-built functions and simply coding all your own ones. It's a good way to learn because you can focus on one aspect at a time: movement, projectiles, spawning and so on, with the engine filling in the gaps with its own solutions wherever you want it to.

There's also a marketplace where you can import features built by other users into your game – sometimes for free, sometimes for a cost. If you're starting out this can be a way to help build your game, especially if you're working on your own.

Art and sound might not be things you have the skill set to create but there are ways round that. You can collaborate, of course, but even if you're working on your own there are tools such as Piskel, an online sprite maker, that make it very easy to create assets for your game. Sounds can be acquired from a host of online libraries such as FreeSound, where music and effects can be licensed for your game, usually for a small fee.

GameMaker's only limitation is simply that it's a 2D engine. Beyond that, it's possible to build any kind of game at all. It's a very easy to learn engine, but capable of so much. For beginners, we recommend this one very highly.



MADE IN GAMEMAKER

GUNPOINT



Gunpoint (above) was created by just a single person in GameMaker. But for small teams huge RPGs are also viable.

HYPER LIGHT DRIFTER

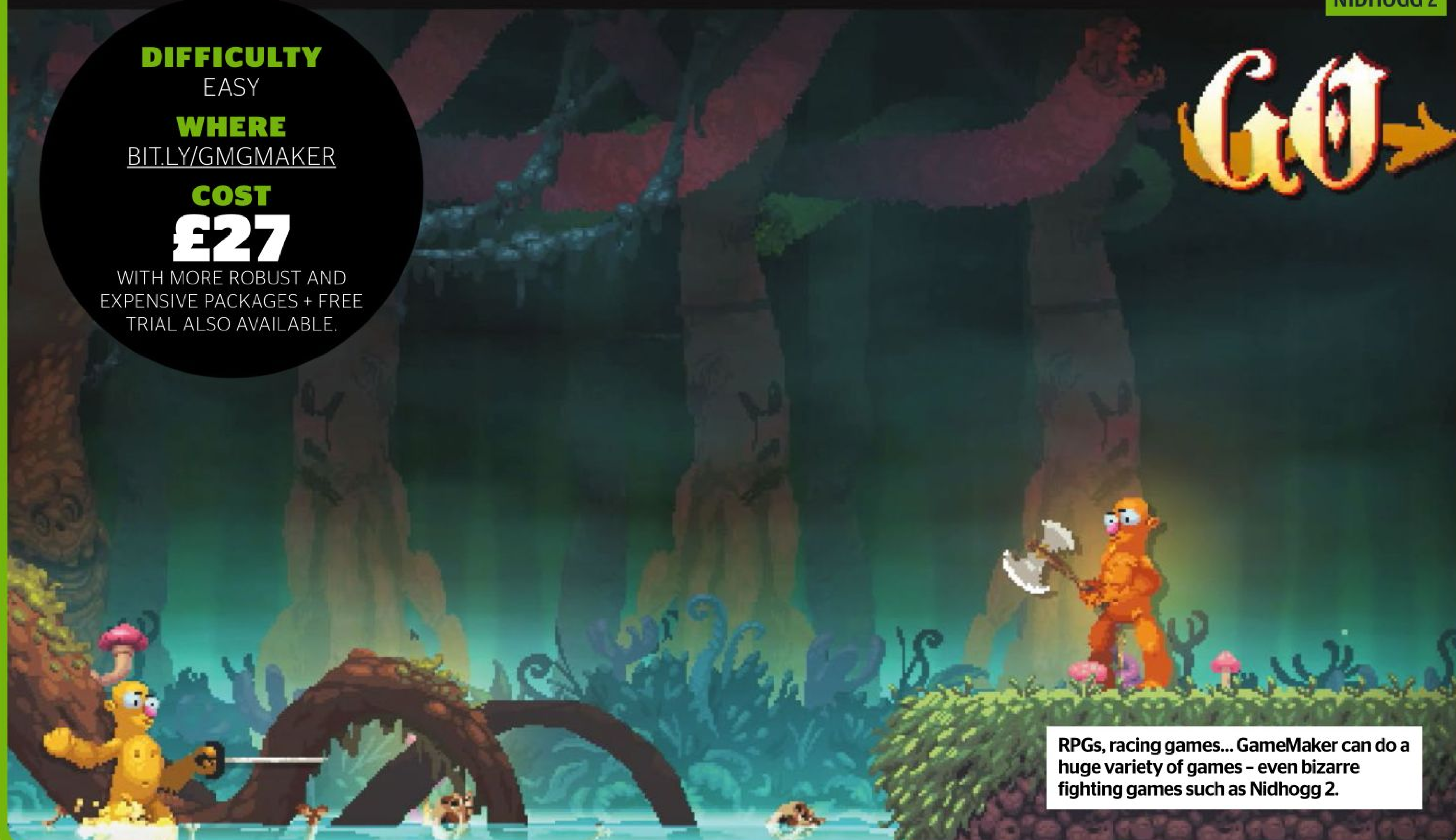


SPELUNKY



"THE BIG THING IS THE INCREDIBLE COMMUNITY SPIRIT... THE MAIN FORUMS ARE A BOTTOMLESS RESOURCE, AND THE INDEPENDENTLY RUN DISCORD SERVER PROVIDES ONE-TO-ONE HELP. WHEN YOU GET INVOLVED IN GAMEMAKER YOU BECOME PART OF THE FAMILY" JUJU ADAMS, PROGRAMMER ON HYPER LIGHT DRIFTER AND SWORDS OF DITTO

NIDHOGG 2



DIFFICULTY
EASY

WHERE
BIT.LY/GMGMAKER

COST
£27
WITH MORE ROBUST AND EXPENSIVE PACKAGES + FREE TRIAL ALSO AVAILABLE.

RPGs, racing games... GameMaker can do a huge variety of games – even bizarre fighting games such as Nidhogg 2.

UNITY

No engine is as prevalent throughout indie games as Unity. Being available for free has put it in the hands of thousands of creators, and not only has this benefitted players, for budding developers it means there's a wealth of tutorials on how to build a whole variety of games, both 2D and 3D. From platformers such as Oddworld New'N'Tasty to lush survival and horror titles such as The Forest, Unity can be used to make almost anything.

Unlike GameMaker or other, simpler, engines, Unity has no built-in game functions. To use it, you're going to have to get your hands dirty and do all the coding yourself. Unity uses C#, so anyone familiar with that scripting language will find themselves at home. For those unfamiliar, there are loads of videos available online to help you get started on virtually any feature you can imagine. There's no one way to approach a problem either; player movement can be handled in dozens of different ways depending on the needs of your project. Finding which solution is best for you can be daunting, but thankfully Unity also has a massive community which is very approachable and willing to help. Be polite and you should have no trouble getting a helping hand. (Just try to do a Google search first – you'll be surprised how much you can accomplish before needing to involve others.)

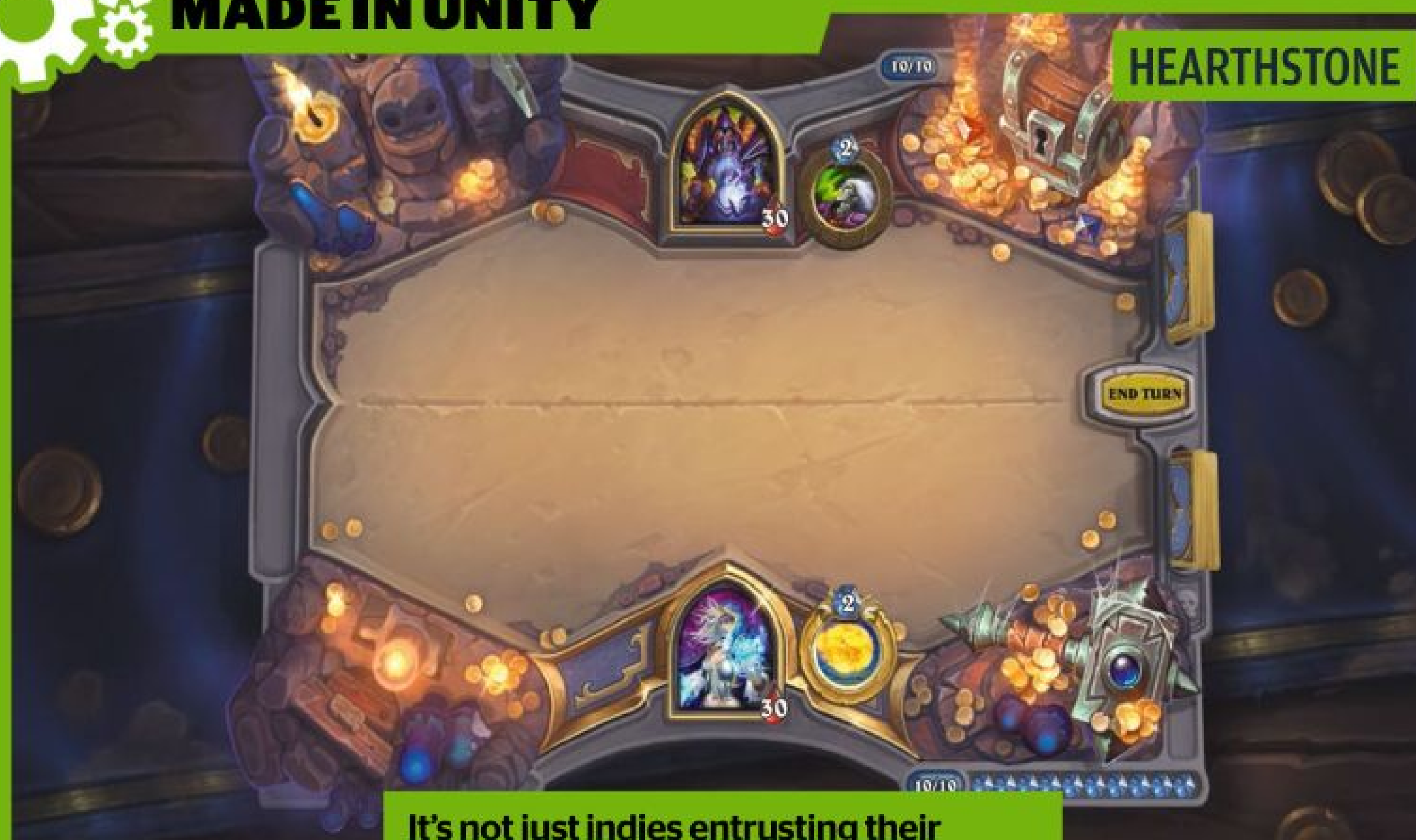
Unity also has a massive asset store that will allow you to import a variety of models, features, and tools at varying prices. Some are even free. When you're starting out, it's perfectly reasonable to use every tool at your disposal, so don't be ashamed of using these assets in your own project. They've been put out there to help you.

Building 3D assets for your Unity project will be a difficult hurdle for many. As mentioned, the asset store can provide those for you if needed, but if you'd rather create your own then there are free pieces of software such as Blender that will allow you to create 3D models.

Unity is a tougher place to start than GameMaker but it opens up a world of possibilities for those who would rather make a 3D game, and thanks to a huge, helpful community it's still pretty easy to learn. With a constant stream of improvements the engine is only becoming more capable. Hugely successful games have been made in it. Maybe it's time for yours to join that list.



MADE IN UNITY



HEARTHSTONE

It's not just indies entrusting their projects to the Unity engine. Blizzard used it for the massive Hearthstone.


ODDWORLD: NEW 'N' TASTY


CITIES: SKYLINES

"UNITY'S PRETTY INTIMIDATING TO GET STARTED WITH, BUT THERE'S LOADS OF HELPFUL TUTORIALS BOTH ON YOUTUBE AND UNITY'S OWN PAGE TO GET YOU UP TO SPEED. AS WELL AS BEING GREAT FOR GETTING TO GRIPS WITH HOW THE ENGINE WORKS, YOU'LL ALSO END UP WITH A TON OF CODE TO REFER BACK TO IN FUTURE" NATALIE CLAYTON, CREATOR OF TRANSIT

DIFFICULTY
MODERATE

WHERE
BIT.LY/GMUNITYTOOL

COST
FREE
BUT ACCESS TO CERTAIN FEATURES STARTS AT £25 A MONTH

The utterly gorgeous Ghost Of A Tale was made in Unity, and while it looks AAA, this was all made by one person!

GHOST OF A TALE

UNREAL

The Unreal engine, a behemoth that has been used to make many of the biggest games ever, has been around for decades, and it has a proud history of fuelling waves of graphically impressive titles. Now Epic Games has made the fourth iteration of Unreal free. The same engine used to make the likes of Gears Of War 4 or Injustice 2 is now in the hands of independent developers. It's not as prevalent as Unity among indies, but it's arguably far more robust. Like Unity, Unreal will require you to start coding to get anywhere; there are few pre-built game functions to help you start. There is, however, the Blueprints system, which offers a visual way to script and map out your game. It still doesn't allow you to make something without coding, but it might help make it easier to keep track of everything in your project and see how it all works together. It's certainly more helpful than digging through pages and pages of code to see what's what.

There also are a number of what are essentially templates that can provide things such as the basic setup for a third-person game, giving you an already-animated model so you can drop a basic player avatar into your game to get you started. That's only relevant for certain kinds of games, but if your project does align with it then Unreal will get you off to a good start, taking care of a few basics – though you'll ultimately need to take it the rest of the way on your own.

It also has many lavish graphical features available. It's relatively easy to make something that is immediately quite visually striking. Looks aren't everything, but they're nice to have, eh? There's a great pipeline for implementing art, which makes things much simpler with great results.

The whole engine is also open source, so is constantly being improved by the community in conjunction with Epic Games. With time more functionality is being added but it's also being made easier to use. There are plug-ins and assets now available which might help you get started making that platformer or action game you've got filed in your head.

This isn't the easiest engine to learn but it will allow you to give your games the look of a large-budget production on a millionth of the budget. If you've an ambitious project and a lot of drive, then this could be the right engine for you.



MADE IN UNREAL

GEARS OF WAR 4



Unreal has long been a staple of triple-A titles, but now indie projects can take advantage of its capability.



FINAL FANTASY 7 REMAKE



THE WITNESS

HELLBLADE: SENUA'S SACRIFICE



Ninja Theory's Hellblade uses the Unreal engine to deliver blockbuster graphics on a small budget.

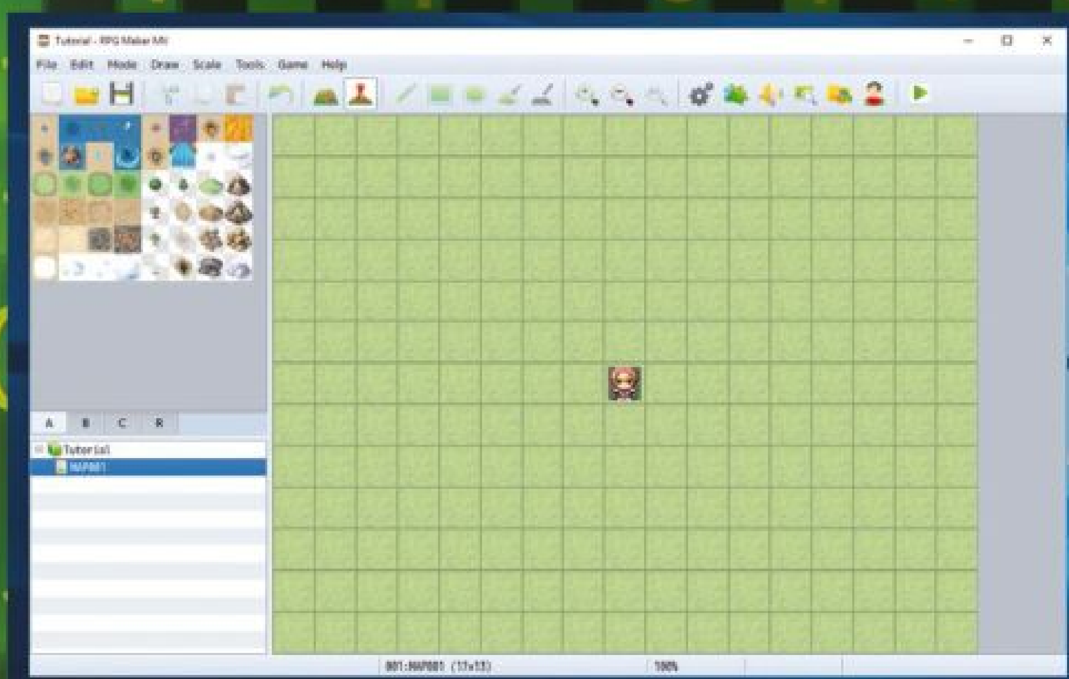
DIFFICULTY
MODERATE

WHERE
BIT.LY/GMUNREAL

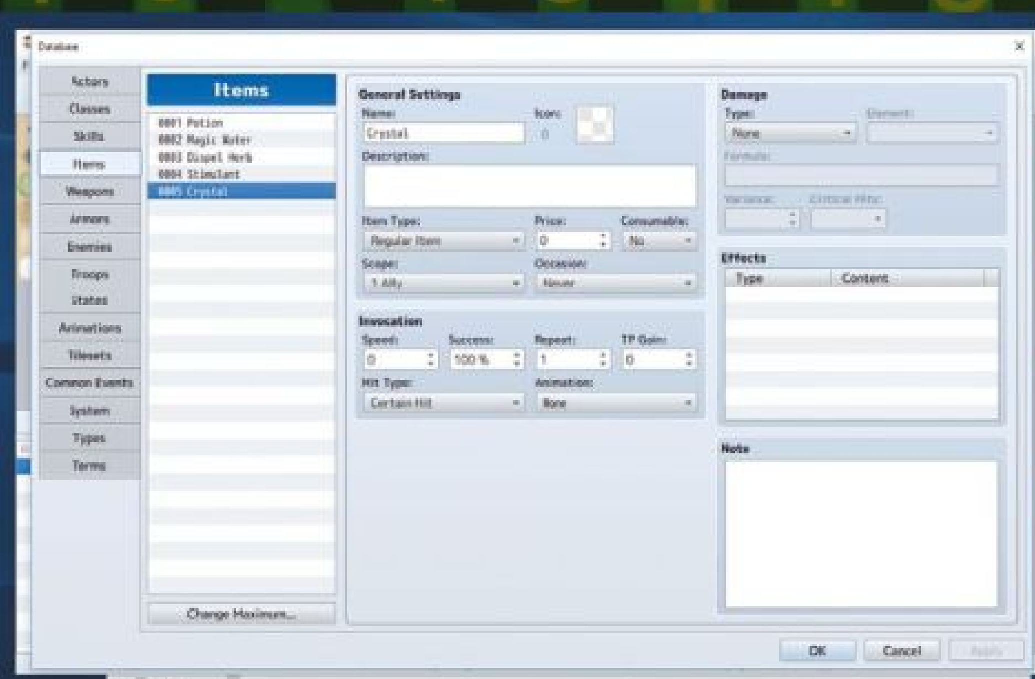
COST
FREE
BUT YOU MAY HAVE TO PAY A ROYALTY FEE

QUEST PRACTICE

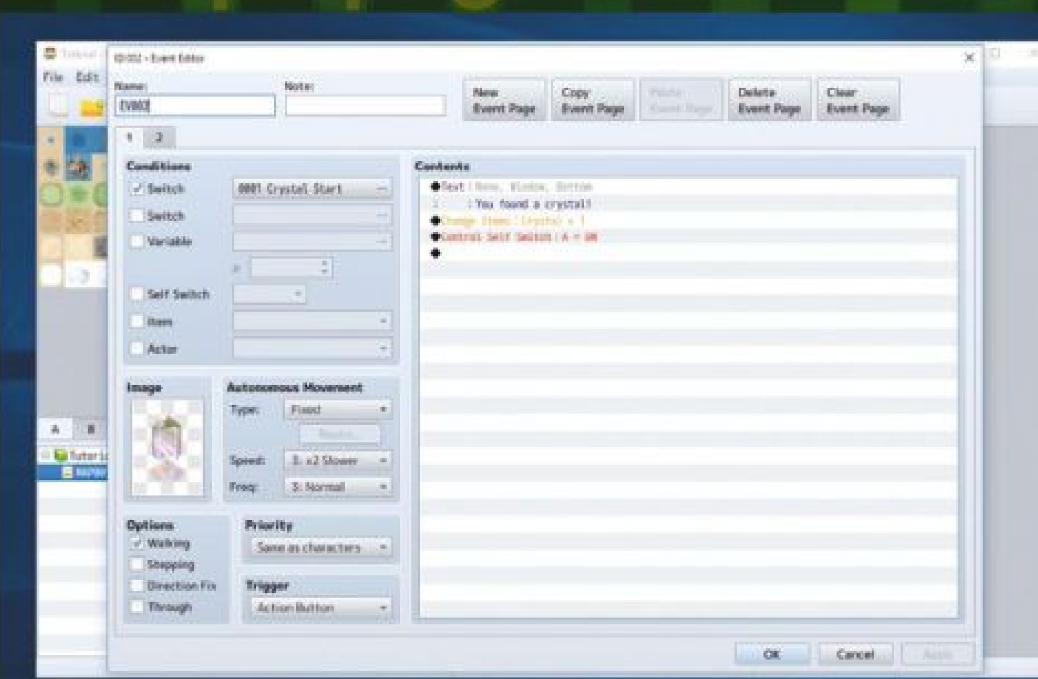
Get started in RPG Maker with our simple step-by step guide – you'll have your own game in no time!



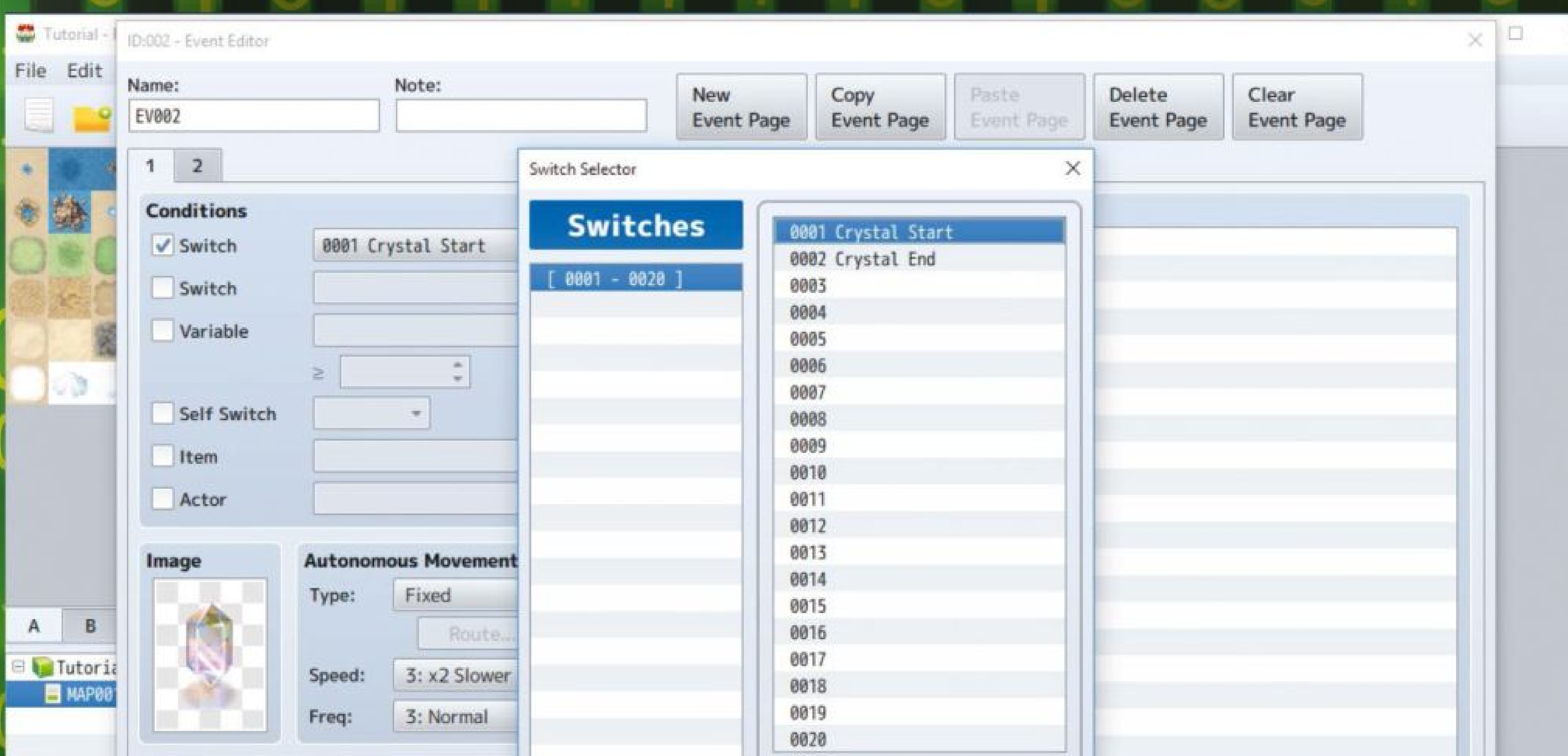
1 We're going to show you how to make your first quest! First, just start up RPG Maker (We're using RPG Maker MV). Click File and select New Project. When it's finished loading you should be looking at something similar to this screen. As you can see, there's already a player character in place and some space for them to move around in. Good start!



2 For this quest, we're going to create an item to collect - a crystal. Go to Tools>Database (or hit F9). Here will be a list of the items in your game. Increase the maximum by 1 and you'll see a new item slot appear. Click on that and edit the properties. Call it Crystal, give it a description if you want, and make sure that Consumable is set to No and Occasion is set to Never.



3 Next, you want to go into Event mode. In Map mode, you can edit the scenery, but in Event mode you can create NPCs, items, battles and so on. So double-click on an empty square near your hero and it will bring up the event editor. Call this event Crystal. Pick a nice crystal image for it, and make sure Autonomous Movement Type is Fixed.



4 Tick Switch in the Conditions box, and click on the Switch box next to it. Here you will create the switches that will define the start and end of your quest. So click on the first switch on the list and call it Crystal Start. Click on the second and call it Crystal End. Make sure you select Crystal Start for this switch, then hit OK. Now this item will only appear once your quest has begun.



5 Next, create a New Event Page, which will give you a second tab for this event. Make sure this has no image. Now, go back to the first tab and in the contents click on the first line and go to Show Text. Enter something like "You found the crystal!" On the next line click and select Change Iitems. Pick Crystal from the list, and make sure it's set to increase by 1. Finally, add another line with Control Self Switch, and make it A and On.

6 To create an NPC, your quest giver, double-click on an empty square around the player character and create a new event. Pick a friendly image for your NPC. Set Autonomous Movement to Fixed. Now, you want to create a conditional branch. Set it to Switch, select Crystal Start from the drop-down menu and have it set to On. Also ensure the Else Branch box is ticked.

7 For your NPC, Create a Control Variable in the next line and select Crystal from the list and then select Game Data>Item>Crystal. Now the game will check the number of crystals the player possess when they talk to the NPC, to determine whether they've finished the quest or not. Later, we'll give the NPC some dialogue for these different situations.

8 Next, add another Conditional Branch, set to Variable. Pick Crystal, set to =, pick Constant, set to 1. Tick Else Branch again. In the next line, create a Control Switch set to Crystal End. Pick Crystal; make it decrease by a constant 1. The next should be Gold, increase by 200. Now your player's rewarded with 200g for completing your quest!

9 Under the Else line, add some text for when you speak to the NPC but the quest is yet to be completed - try "You haven't found it yet." Underneath the next Else line is where you'll determine the dialogue for when you haven't accepted the quest yet, something like "Could you find my magic crystal for me?" Then add a Show Choices, with Yes and No, so the player can accept or refuse the quest.

10 Below When Yes, put a Control Switch for Crystal Start is on with another line of Show Text: "Thank you!" Then, below When No, have another Show Text: "Fine then, loser." It's time to create a second event page and there, make sure the NPC image is added, tick Switch beneath Conditions, and set it to Crystal End. Now add some show text saying, "Thanks for finding my crystal!" and maybe add "Here's your 200g reward!" too.

11 With that, you should be done! Test your game using the test button in the top-right corner and run through your quest. You now know everything you know to make a simple quest with branching dialogue. With those basics covered you're ready to build to more complex adventures - good luck!

Part of the reason the game has been so long in development is Lazar's meticulous attention to pacing.

Who is...



For the first two years of development, Adrian Lazar worked alone. Then he managed to attract funding from an investor: enough for him to quit his job in 2015 and recruit two employees the following year. The three employees of Planet Alpha Game Studio are supported by a small team of external contributors, who are assisting with sound, music, and gameplay programming.

Format Switch, PS4, XO, PC **Developer** Planet Alpha Game Studio **ETA** 2018 **Web** bit.ly/gmplanetalpha

#1 PLANET ALPHA

A journey to another world – in more ways than one

The power to change day to night – or vice versa – is an immediately appealing one. Who hasn't felt the sun streaming through their window in the middle of a glorious kip and wanted to make it bedtime again? But in this atmospheric platformer from a former Io Interactive alumnus, it's got a rather more important use: creeping around in the darkness on a hostile planet might be the only way to prevent yourself becoming an alien snack.

The idea for Planet Alpha has been rattling around Adrian Lazar's brain for close to five years now. It all started at the end of 2013: during his Christmas holiday from work, Lazar found himself "bored to death". So he started working on a project in his spare time. "I was working on Hitman at Io Interactive and I needed something that wasn't about brutally murdering people," he laughs. On a whim, he played Eric Chahi's Another World and that set the creative wheels in motion. "I just loved its atmosphere," he says.

For Planet Alpha's visual style, Lazar took inspiration from somewhere very different. "I moved to Copenhagen nine years ago and I was so blown away by the long twilights that we have here," he explains. "When the sun sets, it can last like an hour or more – it's just amazing." When he tried to replicate it in his game, Lazar was struck by how the adjustment in lighting changed everything. "Visually, in trying to recreate that as an artist, I saw it as an interesting challenge. And, of course, technically it's really difficult because everything needs to look good at any time of day."

A cunning planet

From what we've seen, Lazar has little to worry about on that front. This is a heart-stoppingly handsome side-scroller – in any one moment you'll witness extraordinary sights, such as colossal spacecraft flying past extraterrestrial whales, swimming gracefully through purple skies. It's a world that feels thrillingly alive; even without your intervention, it flourishes, following a natural day-night cycle that you can control. Deep within its dense jungles



Sometimes you'll pause for a moment just to take it all in. And sometimes because walking forward would mean getting crushed by an 80-foot dinosaur.

> "YOU'LL WITNESS EXTRAORDINARY SIGHTS, LIKE SPACECRAFT FLYING PAST EXTRATERRESTRIAL WHALES"



The game's incredibly vibrant palette is a reaction against the "grey, desaturated, monochrome" games Lazar was playing during his final months at Io Interactive. Greys and browns are in short supply here – and the game looks all the better for that.



The flying whales remind us of artist Roger Dean's '70s prog rock album covers. Though we're still not letting editor Robin play his Yes albums in the office.





you'll find large mushrooms that stretch upwards, seeking the sun's rays. Alien structures, too, respond to light and dark.

Many of these changes aren't merely cosmetic; they affect the way you progress through the game. Lazar won't be drawn on details – though it doesn't take a genius to imagine how you might use those mushrooms – but he confirms that new areas will only become accessible at certain times, and that your approach to any situation or threat will be similarly affected. If you need to sneak around, then nightfall should provide useful cover from enemies. "We're trying to tie all of our gameplay pillars – the puzzles, the platforming, the stealth and the exploration – to the day-night cycle somehow," Lazar says.

To maintain the organic feel, the game's pacing will be dictated by the setting. For the most part, you'll be taking it slowly, creeping around to avoid deadly creatures, or solving environmental brainteasers. But then you'll find yourself sprinting at full tilt, sliding down slopes as shots from a background battle fragment platforms in the foreground. Lazar is keen not to overplay these moments, however: "We're not just throwing something in to force it. Of course, we have our platforming moments where things have to collapse and you're running and yeah, those are fun. But those should act as a surprise: we want to make them fit the environment and happen at the right time just to keep things fresh."

LIKE THIS? TRY THIS! LIKE THIS? TRY THIS! LIKE THIS? TRY THIS! LIKE THIS? TRY THIS! LIKE THIS? TRY THIS! LIKE THIS? TRY THIS!

Try this!

Outwardly, PlayDead's Inside would seem to have little in common with Planet Alpha beyond also being a side-scroller. Yet it's similarly atmospheric: see for yourself at bit.ly/gm_pd_inside

Alpha's papa

As an artist, Lazar is obviously a fan of visual storytelling. So while Planet Alpha will have a narrative of sorts, don't expect knotty lore spread across dozens of collectable documents or audio logs. "Sometimes, there will be things that are way bigger than you, and you can't do anything but just watch and sometimes you can actually influence things. But I think it's more interesting and more challenging to tell a story without forcing the player to read it. We have a very basic alien language with symbols representing alien words, and people that want to learn more could decipher those. But the story will be pretty easy to understand without having to do that."

In other words, it's Planet Alpha's world that speaks loudest. It certainly captures the spirit of its biggest inspiration, evoking Another World's blend of wonder and danger. "I wanted to imagine what it would be like to be there in real life," he says. "You'd be worried about what's going to eat you or maybe falling to your death, but you'd also have this feeling where you don't know what's dangerous and what's not. Like if you see an interesting creature you can't decide if you should run or approach it. It's like a nature documentary somehow – I keep picturing David Attenborough looking at stuff. I think he would love this place." Hey, if it gets Attenborough's endorsement, that's good enough for us. ■



The 60 Second Pitch

Loving the alien with **Adrian Lazar**

"Planet Alpha is an adventure that takes place in a living, alien world where you have the ability to control day and night. It combines fast platforming, challenging puzzles, and stealth moments with a unique art style to create an unforgettable experience. We're trying to mix different genres and gameplay mechanics into something unique. People that play the game are saying that it's like nothing they've played before – especially when it comes to other platformers. The game doesn't just stand out just stylistically, and it's not just about the day/night system which is our poster-child mechanic. It goes deeper than that into the atmosphere and the way we tell a story, and the feeling you get from switching between different mechanics – you'll go from puzzles to stealth to action to platforming, and we're hoping to connect everything in an organic manner that doesn't feel forced. This contrast and this change of pacing is what helps the game stay fresh – we're seeing people who come to play the game for one hour staying for three or four."

Format PC **Developer** Jump Over The Age **ETA** Feb 2020 **Web** bit.ly/gm_otherwaters

#2 IN OTHER WATERS

Soaking in the aquatic ambience

Game ideas can come at the unlikeliest of times. For Gareth Damian Martin, inspiration struck during a long holiday, while he was swimming in the Aegean Sea. It was the summer before his 30th birthday, and as the clear Grecian waters washed over him, Martin vowed to make a game as a present to himself.

But In Other Waters is not that game. "I worked on a game called Salt that I built in Twine, which was about swimming and thinking," Martin tells us. "You have to keep pressing the spacebar to keep swimming to keep the narrative going – if you stop pressing it and let the stamina bar decrease, then you surface."

While making Salt, Martin started to think about combining a text-based game with the kind of mechanical interactions you'd find in a more conventional videogame. "I became really interested in this relationship between those two things and started to think about how it could expand into a bigger game." He hit upon the notion of an artificial intelligence driving the mechanisms of a diving suit.

This way he could feature more involving interactions, such as monitoring the suit's oxygen and running its internal processes, while maintaining the text element as a narration of sorts from an active character. So while In Other Waters is about xenobiologist Ellery Vas, who's looking for her partner, Minae Nomura, within an alien ocean, the player takes the role of the suit's AI, which must scan the local area for signs of life, grab biological samples, and more.



Selecting a target before rotating the central dial lets you determine Ellery's heading. Some destinations are off-limits without suit upgrades.

Metroid Prime is a big influence. "I think a lot of games set in alien worlds want to be about exploration but in the end they're really about combat or resource management," Martin says. "I just didn't want to make that compromise. I wanted to make a game that was actually about studying alien life in a real sense, rather than being about studying it a little bit and then shooting it and using its body parts to fuel some kind of engine." Though that's not to say that the ocean won't be hostile. You'll need to upgrade the suit to pass through toxic regions, and not all the aquatic life will welcome you.

The minimalism and tactile shapes in the elegant interface – which in itself feels slightly alien – have led some to suggest it would be perfect for smartphones. While Martin says he's keen to bring In Other Waters to mobile, it feels particularly at home on PC with the extra screen space that affords. "The idea of solitude and the unknowability of the ocean is something that's really important to the game," he says. As things stand, you're just a tiny dot in a huge ocean. We can't wait to feel the impact of the full game. ■



Martin is producing an illustrated book too, containing pictures and biological details of the fictional creatures.

Small... But Perfectly Formed

Five indies set on alien planets to thrill galactic explorers



#1 HYPER LIGHT DRIFTER

Heart Machine's blistering debut is punctuated by intense, precise bursts of combat, but for the most part the eponymous drifter is left alone as he probes the mysteries of a diseased world. This is comfortably one of the most distinctive indie games of recent years.



#2 AXIOM VERGE

Five years in the making, this retro-styled adventure from lone developer Thomas Happ may be indebted to Metroid, but it has ideas that are all its own. An arsenal of weapons helps you deal with the world's threats, while the best have wider applications, factoring into your exploration in creative ways.



#3 STARBOUND

Terraria in space, basically, and that's no bad thing. In truth, this sandbox exploration and settlement-building adventure has a greater sense of purpose than its earthly counterpart, with missions giving it a stronger forward momentum for those who prefer a more structured experience.



#4 ASTRONEER

Still in Early Access after 18 months, System Era's open-ended adventure has expanded, offering more comprehensive base-building on top of its terrain-deforming core. Astroneer's brand of freeform fun is ideal if you're simply looking for a planet on which to potter about.



#5 ELEGY FOR A DEAD WORLD

This prose-powered adventure invites your lonely astronaut to explore lost civilisations and essentially write their obituaries. Sometimes you'll be asked to fill in the blanks, while other places give you a launchpad from which to take off on writerly flights of fancy. Intriguingly different. ■



Format PC, Switch **Developer** Panic Barn **ETA** 2018 **Web** bit.ly/gm_nottonight

#3 NOT TONIGHT

Bouncers plus Brexit equals comedy?

Opening your debut trailer with a clip of a bullish Nigel Farage is a pretty ballsy move. But then Not Tonight was always going to be a political powder keg, with its hypothetical scenario where Brexit talks have collapsed and a far-right party has taken over. "It wasn't meant to poke a wasp's nest," creative director Tim Constant insists. "It's just meant to be an interesting alternate future of Britain, but simply mentioning the word 'Brexit' is so divisive."

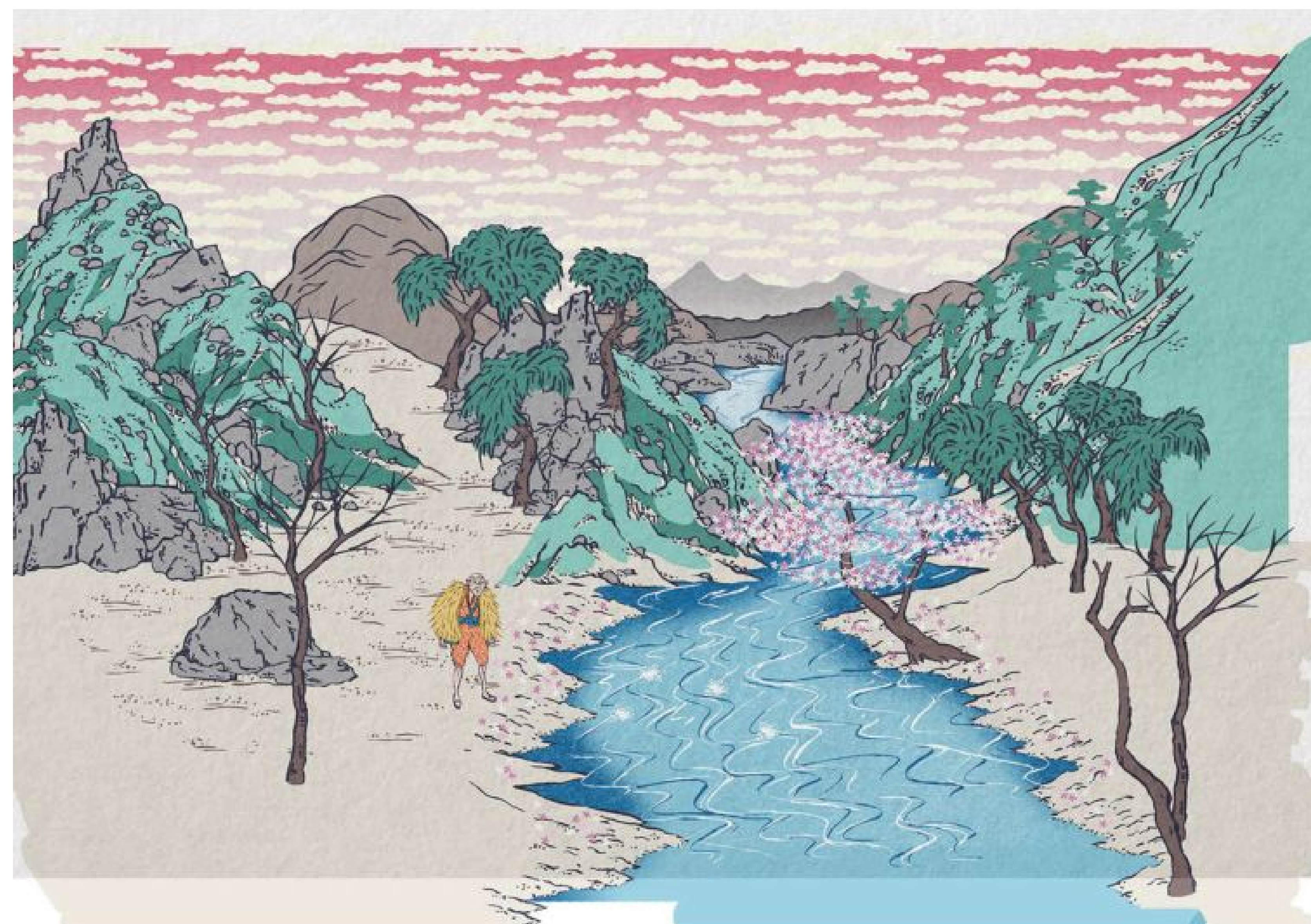
Not Tonight didn't actually have any connection to Brexit when development started. Inspired by Papers, Please and memories of struggling to get into clubs in his late teens, Constant came up with a concept for a game where you would play a bouncer. He built a prototype system, and then the EU membership referendum happened. "All of a sudden there was this comparison between you being a doorkeeper and then the possibility that we were going to stop letting people into the country. It all began to fall into place."

Your protagonist's European heritage is enough for the new regime to consider you a second-class citizen – as such, you're exiled to regional Britain and forced to work as a doorman. More anti-European legislation is introduced and you must choose between keeping your head down and doing the government's bidding or rebelling against this oppressive rule.

You'll have multiple queues to juggle, with guest lists and VIP queues to manage, contraband and dress codes to consider – all while a ticking clock adds extra pressure. But there's a life outside work, too: members of the resistance will show up at your house, and the money you earn (or spurn, by turning a blind eye) is a crucial factor. Stick to the script for a while, and you might be able to afford a silly outfit that'll keep punters intrigued, and thus more willing to queue for longer – a moment of dark humour in a satire that takes the kind of risks more games should. ■



Your home may be a pigsty but you'll want to spend any spare cash on outfits, since they come with different perks to make your job easier.



Format PC **Developer** Small Island Games **ETA** 2018 **Web** bit.ly/gm_haiku

#4 HAIKU ADVENTURE

A game of monkeys, magic, and meticulous metre

Haiku aren't supposed to be written, Small Island's Ceri Williams tells us. Rather, he says, they're supposed to be found. As such, a point-and-click adventure where lines of five or seven syllables (in keeping with the traditional 5-7-5 haiku structure) are the items you must locate to solve puzzles makes a wonderful kind of sense.

"Initially the very first spark of an idea for the game came from seeing pictures of Japanese snow monkeys sitting in hot thermal baths in the winter," Williams explains. From that unusual imagery came the game's striking art style, inspired by traditional Japanese woodblock prints, and the haiku naturally followed.

Your wandering poet uses the lines he collects to assemble haiku that essentially act as transformative spells of sorts. Initially, the effect will be subtle, but as you grow as a poet you'll be able to change your environment quite radically. The magic of metaphor might, for example, allow you to describe a sunset as if the sky is on fire, producing a huge wall of flame that burns a path through a forest. Or the way you describe a river could shift a scene's orientation entirely, so that it becomes a waterfall.

"It's something we hope is a little bit new," Williams says. Haiku as magic? What a delightful concept. ■

"THE IDEA CAME FROM IMAGES OF JAPANESE SNOW MONKEYS"



Environments will be populated by other characters and animals in the finished game, with delicate animations bringing these gorgeous paintings to life

GM Reviews
The Final Verdict!

HOW WE SCORE

0-39 Awful Avoid it as you would a bullet with your name on.
40-59 Poor Major issues here that won't be solved with a hug.
60-69 Decent A mixed bag filled with sweets and sharp stones.
70-79 Good Some flaws, but still a very enjoyable experience.
80-89 Excellent Buy it, love it, thank us when you're done.
90-100 Outstanding A rare and essential piece of brilliance.

The small print: We rate games in comparison to what else is available on the same system, in the same genre, and for the same format at the time of release. So this year's FIFA might score less than a FIFA from three years ago, but still be a better game. Because time, and our expectations, move on. Hey, you're smart, you get it…



Not awarded based simply on score, but rather given to games that possess a special blend of qualities. For instant classics that you won't regret owning.



Format PS4 **Publisher** Sony
Developer Sony **Out** Out now **Players** 1

GOD OF WAR

PS4's latest must-buy reboots a killer as a fab dad

Sony Santa Monica Studio has done what many thought impossible: it's made Kratos likeable. Back in his PS2 and PS3 days, the surly Spartan was perhaps the most unpleasant, hate-filled character to ever appear on PlayStation. But now? Amazingly, he's a caring father who's capable of showcasing nuanced emotion. In transforming Kratos from dirtbag deity to doting dad, the studio has pulled off a Herculean feat. Not that the big H turns up in this captivating, killer reboot, you understand… mainly because our brassed-off pal punched his face to bits in God Of War III. Naughty Kratos.

After exhausting (and garrotting) Ancient Greece, Santa Monica Studio has wisely turned to Norse mythology to re-energise the iconic series. God Of War brings its violent brand of muscular combat and epic setpiece spectacle to the Nine Realms: a Norse kingdom made up of the likes of Asgard, Midgard, Niflheim, and Jotunheim. Oh, and it's one that's held together by the branches of a magic tree, called Yggdrasil. Naturally.

The switch in mythology isn't even the biggest change. There's no question this is the freshest entry in the series since Kratos' Ares-annihilating debut in 2005. The set camera angles of past games have been replaced by an intimate behind-the-shoulder viewpoint; the Spartan's light and heavy attacks now live on R1 and R2 rather than the face buttons; the action now revolves around a central, sprawling Midgard hub area; while seamless cutscene transitions mean you won't encounter a single loading screen throughout this ultra-aggressive adventure.

Visually, the switch to Nordic myth makes for a spectacular setting filled with astonishing sights. Over the course of 30 hours – this God Of War is much longer than its predecessors – you'll witness some of the most impressive, scarcely believable scenery on PS4. Stare up in awe as a titanic turtle towers over a blisteringly colourful, blood-red meadow. Fight Draugr warriors in the frosty plains of the Mason's Channel, with the corpse of the giant Thanmur providing colossal, decaying window dressing. Row around the soothing waters of the Lake Of Nine in a rickety boat (which proves surprisingly satisfying to steer). As a graphical showcase for Sony's hardware, God Of War belongs in the same bracket as Horizon: Zero Dawn. It's a spectacular-looking game.

"AFTER EXHAUSTING ANCIENT GREECE, KRATOS TURNS TO NORSE MYTHOLOGY TO RE-ENERGISE THE SERIES"

Ashes to ashes

This is also a far more mature experience than past GOW titles. In the years since it put out 2012's God Of War: Ascension, it's clear Santa Monica Studio has grown dramatically as a storyteller. While the base plot is simple – Kratos and Atreus set out to spread their wife/mother's ashes from the highest peak in Jotunheim – the pair's fractious, ultimately loving bond fuels a number of quietly moving scenes.

The script is far stronger than its predecessors, balancing subtle character building with moments of levity… usually offered up by a severed head sidekick. A special mention for Kratos' new

Did Dave cry during Kratos' best fatherly moments? He'll never tell.

That sure is one sizeable turtle. The witch who lives inside quickly becomes a useful ally.

voice-over artist, Christopher Judge. He's brilliant. The Stargate SG-1 actor maintains a stern facade for much of the game, but he also brings a pained sorrowfulness and tender paternal pathos to the story's most decisive moments. Unlike TC Carson's supremely shouty, brazenly obnoxious take on the character, Judge succeeds in making Kratos a conflicted, truly three-dimensional lead.

The world the baldy brute inhabits is also more fully formed. Structurally, God Of War is surprisingly similar to Rise Of The Tomb Raider. The central realm of Midgard is a streamlined sandbox that links more linear areas together. The lion's share of combat normally takes place in these more confined areas, but between main story quests, which you can tackle at your leisure, you're perfectly free to spend a lot of downtime messing about in the Lake Of Nine.

There are many diverting side activities to get wrapped up in. Spirits of fallen soldiers litter the land, and you can choose to help them for coin and XP that can be spent on buying better armour and more advanced moves for the new Leviathan Axe – more on that later. Some will ask Kratos and Atreus to retrieve artefacts (a skull and decomposing hands count as 'artefacts', right?), while others request Spartan and son destroy Norse symbols, like a statue of Thor. There are also shackled, screen-filling dragons to set free, glowing green ravens to shoot down, granite-hard Valkyries to defeat, and various collectibles to stock up on. This is a generous package stuffed with rewarding, worthwhile distractions.

While leisurely ticking off side-quests is a hoot, God Of War still revels in savage skirmishes. The revamped combat system feels radically different to what's come before. Mechanically, it has as much in common with Dark Souls as it does its PS3 predecessors. The refreshed camera angle makes fights feel more immediate and claustrophobic, and when you couple this with the new optional lock-on, the comparisons with From Software's legendary series become readily apparent.

"THE SPARTAN'S ADVENTURE MIXES SEISMIC BOSS BATTLES WITH QUIET INTROSPECTION"

Face the axe

Also, the Leviathan Axe is all sorts of excellent. Unlike the Blades Of Chaos, Kratos' homicidally hacking instrument of destruction is deadly at range as well as at close quarters. Hold down L2 and you can hurl the axe at enemies like it's a super murdery boomerang – a quick jab of Triangle will swiftly bring it back to the Ghost Of Sparta's waiting hand. Cutely, its ice powers are also employed in some canny puzzles, which usually revolve around freezing switches to lock bridges and other contraptions in place. It's a terrific weapon and ensures God Of War's razor-sharp combat remains as engaging as ever.

That Kratos' barbaric battles are still so compelling shouldn't come as a surprise. What is a borderline shocker is how much the fallen god's latest feels like a Naughty Dog game. Considering the close proximity between Santa Monica Studio and PlayStation's premier developer, perhaps that's not a



EMPIRE OF THE SON

Meet Kratos' pride and joy

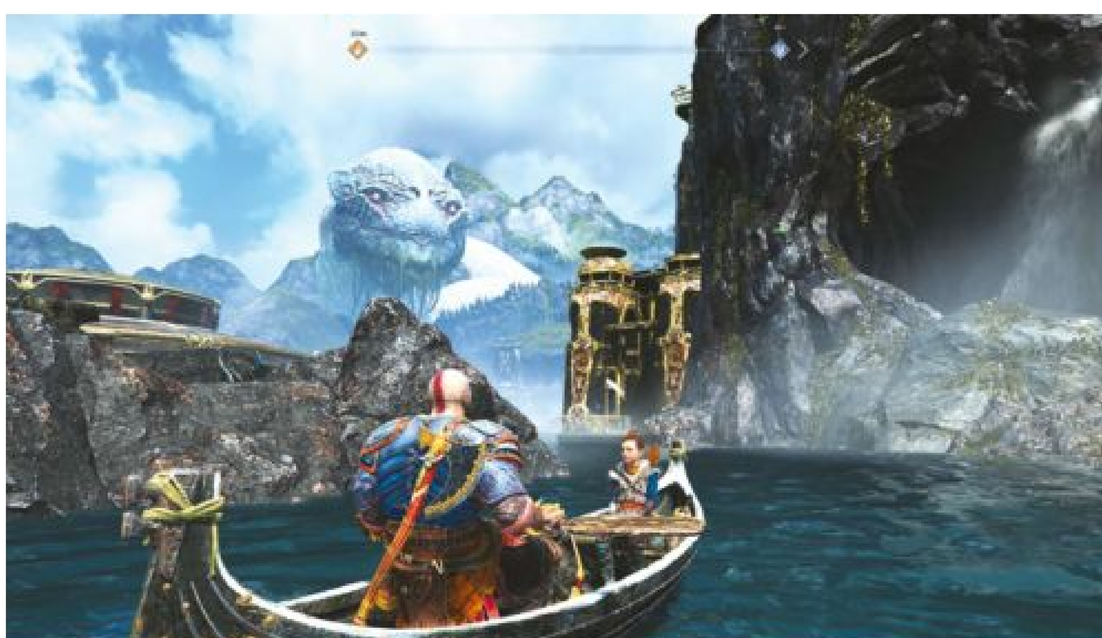
Atreus eventually proves to be an invaluable ally during combat. Once you upgrade his bow, Kratos Jr will happily arrow and distract enemies with deadly precision.

Certain witch-like baddies are only vulnerable after Atreus has tenderised them with a few well-aimed skewers, so it's always valuable to keep the pint-sized monster basher around. A word of warning, though: there's a good two-hour period late in the game where he gets super-annoying. Prepare to grin and bear it, God Of War fans. After all, not every character can be Chris Judge-likeable.





Brilliantly scripted and with the same epic setpieces you'd expect, this is the best GOW in a decade.





Kratos may be a Dad Of The Year contender, but he's still an absolute savage during combat.



GEAR UP FOR A FIGHT

Examining Kratos' shiny new armour and artefacts systems

Unlike in past entries, Kratos is more or less fully customisable. The biggest change comes with an extensive new armour system. Once the Spartan earns an adequate amount of currency, he can go to one of two dwarf brothers, Brok and Sindri, and either upgrade his clobber or buy superior duds.

What gear you choose can have a significant impact on combat, with certain chest plates improving your defences, and other gauntlets amping up your attack. Either way, it's a system that adds a welcome tactical layer to GOW's primal encounters. Whatever bonuses you end up prioritising, experimenting with layouts is always worthwhile.

This armour system also ties into the gear-enhancing artefacts that can now be plundered from chests around the world. Various degrees of increasingly rare trinkets are often locked away in chests that are usually opened with a spot of light puzzle-solving. Purple artefacts are the least common and most powerful, and some will reduce the cooldown on Kratos' formidable special attacks, while others dish out health for every enemy you kill. With such an eclectic array of enemies to brutalise, mixing and matching artefacts and armour is essential.

Being able to further personalise Kratos also draws you even closer to the god, strengthening your bond with a character who has never been more relatable.

monocle-dropping surprise. Whether it's the procedural Uncharted 4-style conversations that pepper boat rides, or the close-up camera and combination of Joel-esque walk and buddy platforming manoeuvres from The Last Of Us, God Of War has learned some valuable lessons from Sony's misbehaving pup.

Impeccable pacing is another quality Kratos has inherited from Team Nate. God Of War has always excelled when it comes to seismic spectacle, but the Spartan's Norse adventure confidently complements seismic boss battles with moments of quiet introspection. Whether fighting a Smaug-dwarfing wyvern or watching as Kratos relives haunting (extra-sociopathic) Ancient Greek memories, the hair-challenged hero's PS4 debut is immaculately paced.

Unfortunately, the move from Zeus-bashing to assaulting Odin's cronies isn't entirely successful. In short, and partly because of the movie magic of special effects genius Ray Harryhausen, Norse mythology simply isn't as iconic as the Greek equivalent. Stoving in troll heads doesn't feel as significant as ripping the lone peeper out of a monstrous cyclops' socket, and in general, the rather generic ghouls PS4 God Of War pits you against are nowhere near as recognisable as the conga line of gorgons and minotaurs Kratos used to regularly disembowel. Admittedly, the main villain is interestingly portrayed, but once you've murdered the king of the Greek gods, killing a mere underling of Odin just can't compare.

The concept of the Nine Realms isn't fully realised, either. Only five regions are actually accessible, and of them, only Midgard feels fully fleshed out. Perhaps the other regions may appear as DLC down the line, and the core game is generous enough that Santa Monica Studio could justify that decision. Still, it feels like a bit of a tease to have these four inaccessible worlds dangled tantalisingly in front of you.

Daddy issues

Narratively, the game isn't entirely successful, either. At points, Atreus becomes an unbearable pill, though in his defence, a quick press of Square usually ensures he's a steadfastly reliable arrowing tag-team partner. Tonally, God Of War isn't wholly comfortable in its skin. A pair of bickering dwarves act as comedic foils, but their lines only hit marginally more than they fall flat. Still, compared to Kratos' past titles, rebooted GOW is a wholesale home run.

When you add up the Spartan's successes, the god-ruining antihero's PS4 debut should be considered a knockout victory. This is a superbly paced, deftly written, visually spectacular showcase for PS4 that shows Sony still rules the roost when it comes to console exclusives. It doesn't matter whether you're playing the game at a rock-solid 1080p/30fps on the base PS4, or in the eye-arousingly pretty 4K mode on PS4 Pro: adverts for Sony's world-conquering consoles don't come any stronger. God Of War should absolutely be considered in the same breath as Uncharted 4.

Kratos' six years away from the limelight has been more than worth the wait. God Of War has taken cues from recent PlayStation greats, and the lessons it's learned have been to the series' benefit. Not only has this long-standing franchise reinvented its structure and combat, it has, at long last, made its protagonist a relatable character. If you own a PS4, there's really no reason not to own God Of War. While the combat may not be quite as addictive as GOW III, this is arguably the most successful series reinvention since Resident Evil 4. ■

GM LOVES...

- ✔ It could be PS4's best-looking game. Holy hell it's handsome.
- ✔ Kratos is finally a sympathetic, relatable character.
- ✔ Combat is still brilliant and the pacing is exemplary.

GM HATES...

- ✘ Atreus (admittedly for plot reasons) can get annoying.

Better than...



God Of War: Ascension
The weakest full-fat GOW is no match for this revitalised redux. PS4 God Of War is far more interesting than this half-baked prequel.

Worse than...



God Of War II
Kratos' first sequel is still the series' best game. Beautifully paced and featuring the finest boss fights around, it remains the one to beat.

NEED TO KNOW



Though neither Thor or Odin appear in the game – sorry, Chris Hemsworth fans – other Norse legends do feature. Admittedly, they're not quite as iconic as Greek gods Zeus or Poseidon.

GM JUDGEMENT

91%



An excellent, essential update of a PlayStation icon. Kratos has never been more relevant or relatable.

Dave Meiklehan

You can have a hat in any shape and colour you like, as long as it's gold and spiky. Kingship is hard.









Format PC **Publisher** Sega **Developer** Creative Assembly **ETA** Out now **Players** 1-4

TOTAL WAR SAGA: THRONES OF BRITANNIA

Smart new direction for an old series gets Offa on the right foot



Nothing lifts the spirits like seeing an enemy king fleeing in terror. Except maybe seeing him in pieces.

Being a king is simple, right? Shiny, pointy hat to wear, special important chair to sit on, steady supply of feckless peasants to torment. Simple and fun. But nobody ever mentions the betrayal, or the demands, or the crushing and constant requests for equitable wealth distribution. Uneasy lies the head that wears a crown.

It seems Creative Assembly has employed a specialised coronet-bolstering department to make that crown even heavier. And it's a good thing. Thrones Of Britannia does something no Total War has done before, which is make you feel like an actual king, miserable man-management and all. Instead of being an omnipotent and unquestionable monarch, you muddle through a febrile peace in one the most tumultuous periods in British history – 878 AD. The Vikings have been stopped but not defeated; Britain is still occupied; and various hungry powers tear at the flesh of a kingdom too small to share. And, as the leader of one of the game's ten playable factions, it's your job to carve yourself a healthy slice. Every success is shared. Every failure is your fault.

That all sounds very Total War, and it looks familiar, too. At first glance, nothing much seems to have changed. We're back in the British Isles, where we've been in so many previous games in the series: Medieval, Attila, Kingdoms, Rome. But it only takes five minutes with the new campaign map to appreciate the differences. This is the richest Total War map to date, densely packed with walled cities and satellite villages, featuring focused, engaging points of conflict. Places you never dreamed would make it into a videogame are here, and there's a specific thrill in seeing your own naff town demastered for a bygone age. Forget Stamford, hello Steanford!

Axe nicely

The density is intimidating at first. There's almost too much information to parse, and spending money upgrading vulnerable villages seems frivolous. Whereas your main cities are garrisoned and can repel an invading army, the smaller settlements are completely helpless. Unless your army is nearby, they can be sacked or occupied without a fight. But this is one of the game's many clever tweaks, and it forces you to play differently. Instead of a network of neatly-defended towns, you're encouraged to range across your borders with an agile, reactive force. Fight on too many fronts and it's impossible to defend your lands. This forces you to consider every conflict, expand carefully, and be constantly wary of your neighbours.

It also leads to another first for a Total War game: being locked in constant conflict is a terrible idea. There's a war fervour meter, which will decrease as you spend time locked in fruitless campaigns. Your subjects will start to crave peace, and become dissatisfied. Unlike previous games in the series, it's not merely a case of balancing your wealth against the size of your army. Being at war is *stressful*. Food supplies will diminish if managed badly. Far-ranging campaigns require supplies, which can only be restocked in your own regions. These thoughtful, almost punitive touches force you to consider everything before committing to a campaign. It also resembles the more nuanced mods available for classic Total War games; hardly a surprise, since game director Jack Lusted started off as a modder himself. 'Occasional War Saga' might have been a more accurate name.

Another layer of realism comes from the way units are recruited and upgraded. Military buildings are completely gone. Instead, you upgrade your troops via tech trees. It's a sharp departure from the way things have previously worked in Total War, but an intriguing one. Your settlements become hubs of commerce or religion, rather than spawning pools for fighty men. And when you do recruit troops, that works differently, too. You can't just conjure a giant army because you've got the coin to pay for all those soldiers. Instead, recruited units start in a depleted state and gradually grow to full strength. It's a sensible, evocative tweak, which makes you feel like you're slowly mustering a force rather than filling in slots on an army card. It's also more enjoyable to play, with less chance of a previously defeated army rocking up on your borders with a slavering 20-stack horde they magicked from nowhere.

KEEP NOBLES IN THEIR PLACE

If money doesn't work, try using torture

Your generals and governors can be an unruly, ungrateful lot, and they get fractious if they feel they're being treated unfairly. The following entries, in order of desperation, are some easy ways of ensuring they don't try anything too rebellious.



1 Finding the right wife for a noble can help calm them down. Of course, the *wrong* wife will do the opposite.



2 You can pay to secure loyalty, but remember nobles who can be bought command less respect.



3 Nobles love land. Share your estates as you expand – you can always steal them back later.



4 Torture is the quickest way to win an argument. Just don't expect your victims to stay loyal forever.



5 Still disloyal? Try assassination, or an enforced death in battle. They look heroic; you solve a problem.

"MAKES YOU FEEL LIKE AN ACTUAL KING, MISERABLE MAN-MANAGEMENT AND ALL"

Branching out

Tech trees, too, have changed. You now earn the right to research new technology by upgrading the right buildings or recruiting the correct number of units. It sounds like a backwards way of doing things, but it works – and it also crystallises the differences between factions. You won't find the same disparity between forces as in Total War: Warhammer, but they are all different. Some factions have to expand into new territories before they can unlock tech trees. Irish factions, for example, don't have access to the same trading buildings as English ones (ignoring for the moment the fact that neither Ireland nor England technically existed during this period). Elsewhere, sea-based Viking factions can earn extra money by trading slaves, and don't suffer the same attrition penalties as other factions while at sea. It makes for a rich and varied game that never feels limited by the realistic setting.

It's not all new, however. Battles still feel very similar. Sieges have been upscaled after the reductive city engagements in Total War: Warhammer, and capturing a garrisoned settlement feels like more of an achievement. But if you didn't love the combat in previous Total War games, this won't convert you. And Thrones lacks the wild variety of units seen in the Warhammer spin off. But truthfully, it barely matters. The significant changes here happen on the campaign map, and they're almost all welcome. The main conquest is no longer just set dressing, but a real, reactive, exhilarating story that lives up to the 'saga' element in the title. It's not always easy, and the constant appeasement of needy nobles might frustrate those who just want a clean path between battles, but if you've ever craved a Total War game that does intrigue as well as it does excitement, this is a welcome new direction for Sega's venerable strategy series. Wearing the crown might be uneasy, but it's worth every sleepless night. ■



NOT ALL VICTORIES ARE BORN EQUAL

By any means necessary

Crushing your opposition isn't the only route to success. A wise general explores all their options before committing. If you don't feel like subduing your enemies by force, there are other ways to win. Weaker factions can be made vassals – saving you the trouble of crushing them – and increasing your fame via building and research is also an option.

What happened to that general who kept asking for more land to secure his loyalty? Not sure. He definitely wasn't tortured, divorced, and forced into a certain-death battle, if that's what you're implying.

GM LOVES...

- War feels like a grand undertaking – and winning feels even better.
- Micromanaging estates makes you feel like an actual monarch.

GM HATES...

- Battles are still largely the same as they've ever been.
- The units feel ordinary after Total War: Warhammer.

Better than...



Total War: Rome 2
Thrones somehow manages to have more depth and intrigue than the faction-rich Rome 2, while still being far easier to manage.

Worse than...



Total War: Warhammer
It's a close run-thing, and the two are very different games. But our hearts still belong to the Old World. We love battling with orcs.

NEED TO KNOW



This is the first in a planned series of Total War spin-offs with the 'Saga' name. The idea is they focus in on pivotal moments in history, spanning shorter periods across smaller areas.

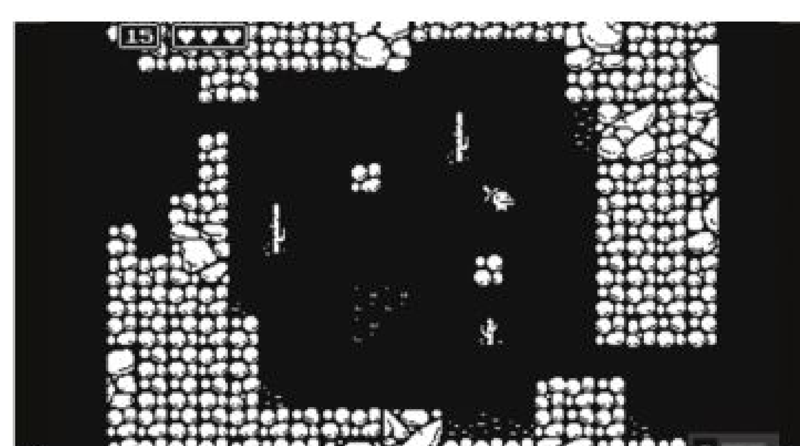
GM JUDGEMENT

88%



An exhilarating departure, full of character, which still feels like a classic Total War game.
Matt Elliott


As basic as the visuals are, they're extremely evocative – you'll grow to love this world.


Format PC **Publisher** Devolver Digital **Developer** JW, Kitty, Jukio, and Dom **ETA** Out now **Players** 1

MINIT

Against the clock

Life really is short, isn't it? Well, if you think you've got it bad, imagine you only had 60 seconds to do everything. That's the situation of our duck-faced protagonist in Minit, who's caught in a recurring 60-second loop: after that time almost everything resets and they're sent back to their home to start all over again.

The challenge of the game is to see how much you can accomplish when you have only a single minute to go anywhere, fight anything, or solve any puzzle. While it might sound potentially frustrating it's not as punishing as it initially appears, with shortcuts around the world eventually presenting themselves and items carrying over between lives. What this limitation does, as the best do, is force you to get creative. It compels you to learn the world, how to navigate it more quickly, how to save precious seconds by cutting across a corner or avoiding a group of enemies. Which works because there are many, mostly intuitive, ways to do so. It's an environment made to be broken by the player's input – or at least bent.

It's not all problem solving, though. There's plenty in Minit that's playful, there to be discovered and enjoyed for its own sake. The watering can you'll unlock isn't just for getting past obstacles, but also makes a great prankster's tool. Having all these little jokes and secrets is what makes Minit's world feel alive and real, not just like a series of puzzles. The characters who populate it bring life to it too. Short though their dialogue is, each made us smile in their own way, and they just make Minit a lovely place to be. Despite the spectre of death hanging over the game at all times, it's ultimately a chilled-out space to inhabit.

Time flies

The minimalist black and white visuals help things along nicely. They're cute for sure, adorable little sprites full of personality (matched by a truly wonderful soundtrack that makes the most of the 60-second loop) but more importantly the stark simplicity makes it easier to read, to figure out what you can and can't do, what shortcuts can be taken, and what secrets are out there.

Simplicity is Minit's major strength. There's no complex combat system, or levelling up, or sorting through loot. There are a few unlockable items and abilities, but really it's all about that central concept, and every puzzle and obstacle relates directly to it. This is a game about one idea, done to its absolute best and played out over a couple of hours. Minit, like the loop of its premise, is a short, focused experience that makes every single moment memorable and clever. There are echoes of the original Zelda games in Minit, but they're the distillation of all the best moments, with all the padding that comes with combat and boss fights cut out. Though it plays nothing alike it reminds us most of Superbrothers: Sword & Sworcery, a game that wants you to get caught up in moments and ideas, to be in awe of all these magical little sequences rather than invested in complex mechanics.

The haunted house. The secret temple. The hidden oasis. Minit may be short but every part of it is going to stay with us for a very long time. ■

"WHAT THIS LIMITATION DOES, AS THE BEST DO, IS FORCE YOU TO GET CREATIVE, TO LEARN THAT WORLD"

What happens in the office once every 60 seconds? Sam mentions Lightning Returns again!

GM LOVES...

- Its core idea is brilliant, and never outstays its welcome.
- The visuals are lovely – nostalgic yet refreshing.
- Learning its world and how to bend the rules is a joy.
- It's full of memorable and genuinely funny characters.

Better than...



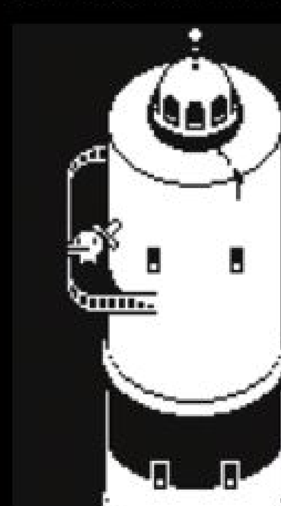
Rain World
Both striking games, with memorable visuals and cute, animal-like leads, but Rain World fails to deliver as perfectly on its premise as Minit.

Worse than...



Superbrothers: Sword & Sworcery
While fantastic, Minit didn't quite get under our skin the way this Capy Games classic did.

NEED TO KNOW



Minit was made in 2D game creation system GameMaker – check out our easy guide to making your own videogames over on p60 to find out how you could create an indie title like this!

GM JUDGEMENT

92%



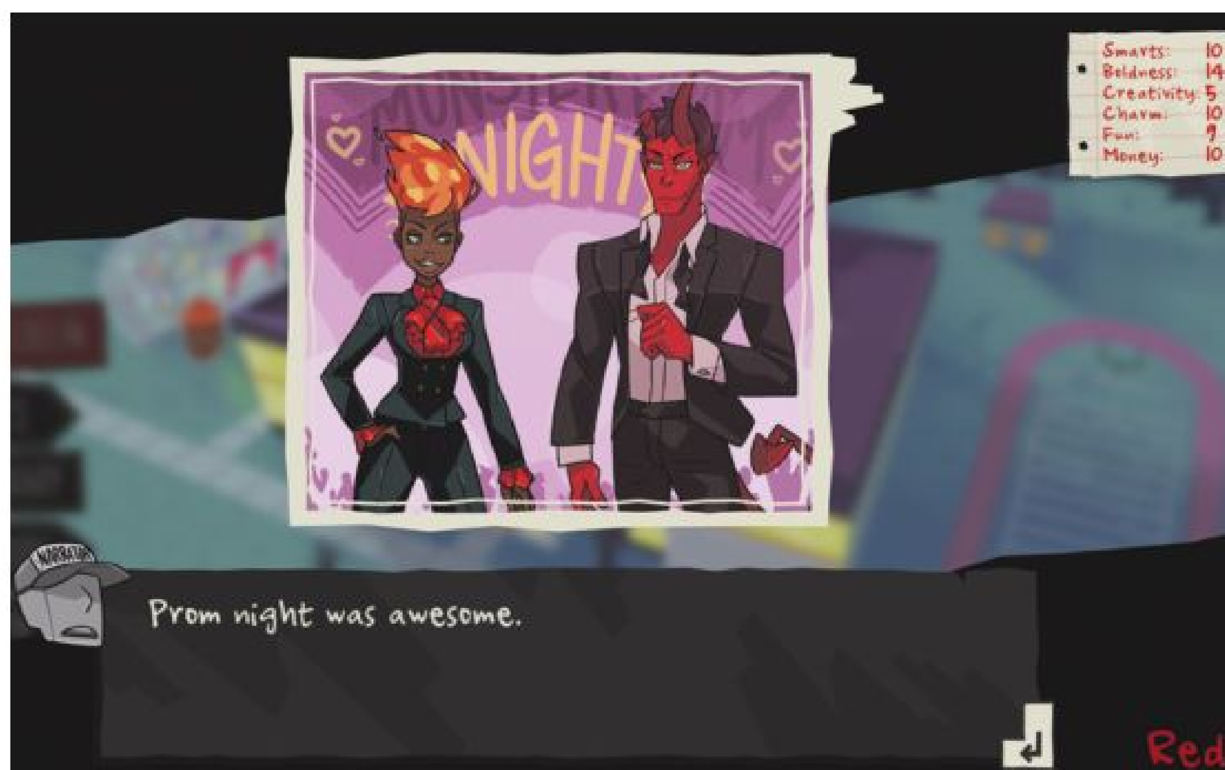
A simple idea that wastes no time. Clever, imaginative and full of personality. A mini-masterpiece.
Sam Greer





Monstrous abominations have never been so adorable and characterful. Do we have to pick just one?





Format PC **Publisher** Those Awesome Guys **Developer** Beautiful Glitch **ETA** Our now **Players** 1-4

MONSTER PROM

Love in the time of monsters

If American movies are to be believed, the school prom is a vital landmark in everyone's life. (Not everyone has them, and some of us had videogames to play. Can't go to a loud room full of drunk students when it's Raid night – come on, think about this.)

A hit on Kickstarter back in late 2016, Monster Prom promised a unique take on the dating sim, the visual novel, and the concept of beauty itself! Well, the first two. Everyone's pretty conventionally cute here. At any rate, it's finally here – does it give us what was promised?

Ghoul friend

Monster Prom is an intriguing mix of traditional visual novel mechanics and party-game zaniness. One to four players take control of young monstrous highschoolers, and in the three weeks before prom go about courting one of six potential prom dates: Liam the hipster vampire, Damien the psychotic demon, Scott the jock werewolf, Miranda the posh fishgirl, Vera the mean-girl gorgon, and Dolly the party-mad ghost. Each player has a certain number of turns (which varies depending on the number of players and chosen game length) to take part in school activities, improve their stats, and endear themself to the monster of their dreams. At the end, you must choose a monster to ask to the prom – whether they say yes or not depends on your performance.

The major selling point of Monster Prom is the absolutely fantastic art. It's cute, it's expressive, and it's charming. Characters have a range of expressions and outfits, and there are tons of unique scenes to be found. Despite sometimes being pretty horrible individuals, it's hard not to love all of the main cast due to the high-quality artwork. The style might not appeal to those looking for grit and realism... but then those people shouldn't be buying a game called *Monster Prom*.

The writing is bubbly and, more often than not, genuinely funny. It's pretty risqué, with drugs, sex, and general misbehaviour a constant topic of conversation. The main flaw of the writing is that it can be a little too quirky at times, to the point where it becomes grating. There's only so many times you can chuckle at a hyperbolic joke about dancing cats, creative arson, or meta-memes. There's not a great deal of depth either. The storylines are quick and comedic, which is as intended (each run takes about 30 to 60 minutes), but this doesn't motivate repeated playthroughs. The game does have laudable inclusivity, with pronoun options and no restrictions on character sexuality.

Monster Prom is a fun diversion, but it has something of an identity problem. Is it a visual novel with many paths, designed to be played many times to see all the endings? Or is it a silly party game, meant to be enjoyed with drinks and friends? It has quite confusing mechanics that require repeated playthroughs to understand, which would suggest the former. But it's also silly and kind of shallow, and quickly gets repetitive when played alone. There are secret endings and hundreds of possible events, but in order to see them you may have to wade through the same series of events dozens of times. It's definitely worth playing, but don't expect more than a few hours' entertainment. ■

> "MONSTER PROM IS A FUN DIVERSION, BUT IT HAS SOMETHING OF AN IDENTITY PROBLEM"

Will Laurence succumb to referencing the Monster Mash in this review? No, but if he did it'd be a graveya–no!

GM LOVES...

- The characterful art is almost worth the price on its own.
- The funny writing hits the mark more often than not.

GM HATES...

- Mechanics can be confusing, and it's unclear what stats do.
- There are hundreds of events, but each run plays out similarly.

Better than...



HuniePop
Monster Prom isn't perfect, but at least it isn't shameless cheesecake. And trust us, being ace at tile-matching games will never lead to true love.

Worse than...



Hatoful Boyfriend
Though infamous pigeon-dating sim Hatoful Boyfriend has lower-quality art, it's a much more coherently quirky skewering of dating sim tropes.

DLC



If the base game sounds a bit scanty to you, you could always wait for the planned DLC, which should add new storylines and characters, including a romance-able Eldritch Horror Girl.

GM JUDGEMENT

77%



It's fun, with great art and enjoyable characters, but lacks narrative depth and gets repetitive.
Laurence Phillips

GM **Review** *The Final Verdict!*

When you shoot an enemy that's been knocked down, you can choose which part of their armour to hit.

Format PC **Publisher** Paradox Interactive **Developer** Harebrained Schemes **ETA** Out now **Players** 1-2

BATTLETECH

Go ahead, mech my day

Max 'Peanut' Mullen stands alone. The mech he's strapped into has lost both its arms, and its chest plate is sparking ominously. With no weapons, he can't shoot the final enemy, and on its next turn a volley of rockets will turn his bot to scrap. This is his last chance. He charges, flinging headfirst into the enemy in a crunch of metal. It recoils, staggers, and topples over. Peanut survives, but all around him are the smoking remains of the rest of our squad, three pilots dead in the wreckage. "Mission successful," the game declares. That's one way of looking at it.

In BattleTech, failure is unavoidable. You're outnumbered in virtually every fight, and if the enemy rockets don't blast you to bits then the heat from your weapons will fry your pilots inside their suits. To stand a of chance of surviving its turn-based battles, you have to think five moves ahead.

On your turn, you move one of your four mechs a limited distance on the battlefield, and then attack an enemy. The further you move in a turn, the more 'evasion' you gain, which makes you harder to hit. Your mechs carry a variety of weapons, from missile launchers to lasers, and each one works best at a specific range. The idea is to attack from a range that gives you the best chance of hitting – the percentage is shown on-screen – while ensuring you keep an eye on your heat gauge. If it gets too high, you'll take damage.

Enemy mechs can take a beating, so to kill them quickly you'll need to target individual armour parts, ripping them off to expose the fragile structure beneath. Arms, legs, and sections of torso all take damage separately, and you can focus fire either by positioning your mech towards the side you want to target or by taking 'precision shots', which use up the morale that builds throughout a fight.

"IT'S REMARKABLE HOW MANY FIGHTS COME DOWN TO THE WIRE"

Fights feel overwhelming at first because the game doesn't bother to explain its systems in any detail. Some attacks will damage a mech's stability, raising a separate gauge, and if it's high enough they'll fall over. But the game never tells you what types of attacks will make your opponents trip up. It never properly explains what the different indicators for lines of sight are (red, dotted white, solid white), nor does it walk you through the armour system that sits at its core. For the first six hours we're constantly failing and reloading. It's not fun and, bizarrely, the game has no difficulty settings, so you're stuck with its wicked ways.

Turning point

But when it finally clicks, you feel clever, and you learn how to stack the odds in your favour. That means accounting for your enemies' most likely moves, and cutting them off. It means switching off some of your weapons individually to generate less heat. It means testing several locations before you lock in your move, so that you squeeze every last percentage out of your chance to hit.

At that point, the difficulty feels exactly right, and it's remarkable how many



ONE GIANT LEAP FOR MECHKIND

Exploring the galaxy in BattleTech

In the campaign, you'll find some contracts on the planet you're currently orbiting, but others will take weeks to travel to. In that time, you won't earn any money, so its often best to exhaust all the local contracts before you look for employment further afield. If you want, you can also just plot your own course and fly to whatever planet takes your fancy, hoping there'll be work for you when you get there. Check each world's difficulty ratings before setting out, though: going for the easy ones is a good way to build up some cash early in the story.







If you overheat you'll damage yourself, and you can break your mech if you push it too far.





You plan your moves from a zoomed-out perspective, and then move in to watch the action unfold.



YOU MECH ME BETTER

The arms race never stops

At the end of each battle you're given a heap of new items. The most valuable are mech parts, as you really don't want to run out of working mechs (and therefore an income). Get three parts for a specific type of mech and your crew will automatically assemble them into the real thing, ready to send into battle.

The next best items are new weapons. You can find upgraded versions of ones you currently own that grant special benefits such as a higher critical hit chance, or simply better weapons within the same class type. If you acquire a weapon you want, you can attach it to one of your existing mechs provided it can take the weight. Upgrades take time, and we find that refitting our mechs is one of the key restrictions on how often we can go into battle. They can take 50 days or more if you're stripping them down and rebuilding them – a long time to be out of action. It quickens when you improve your ship, but it still feels like an age when you've got jobs to do and crew to pay.

Your engineers can only work on one mech at a time, which means that upgrades slot into a queue. Line up a couple of major refits and throw in some urgent repairs from a recent contract and you're looking at months without a full complement of mechs. It therefore always feels like a balancing act: should you upgrade your mech and put it out of action, or should you make do with what's currently working for you? It's a tricky decision, and we struggled to find a sweet spot.

fights come down to the wire, with all of your mechs on their last legs as you finally land the killer blow. It's tense, and you're always worried that your enemy's next missile strike is going to be the one that cripples you.

The campaign mode, which is the centrepiece of the game, makes it similarly tense off the battlefield. Set in the far future, it sees you in charge of a travelling band of space mercenaries which gets pulled into a political tug-of-war. You complete priority missions to advance the story, and it'll take you a good 20 hours to see the end, but the narrative only really exists to nudge you forward. The meat of it is in managing your squad month-to-month. You have running costs, so you need to negotiate enough contracts to stay afloat financially while slowly picking up new pilots, mechs, and weapons upgrades.

Every month is a struggle. Peanut may have survived, but the fact that we've come back from our mission three pilots light quickly takes its toll. We recover the mechs, but the repairs are costly, and they're out of action for months while our technicians bash them back into shape. With no mechs, we can't take on any more contracts, and we slowly spiral towards bankruptcy. It's painful. We reload a few hours back, vowing to keep more mechs in reserve.

Again, BattleTech fails to explain your management options in any detail. We end up spending a solid hour digging into some boring on-ship dialogue just to work out the basics of what's going on. That's not a good sign. But just like the combat, it starts to shine once you get to grips with it, and making ends meet feels like a big achievement. The mech customisation is the best bit, and you can refit each one to your liking by adding and removing individual parts.

Under the hood

We turn our Shadow Hawk into a melee specialist with a flamethrower and an arm mod to make it punch harder, and transform our Centurion into a long-range specialist with a missile launcher and a ranged laser. When you combine that customisation with levelling up your pilots' various skills, your squad starts to feel unique to you.

The contracts vary from assassinations to escorting convoys and more inventive story missions with multi-part objectives. They're mostly fun, but some have portions that should be cut entirely. In escort missions, you have to clear a site of enemies so that friendly transports can move safely through the area. There's nothing wrong with that, except that you have to then escort them halfway across the map. The game remains turn-based the whole time, despite the fact there are no enemies around at this point, and the friendly vehicles move painfully slowly.

Also painfully slow are the loading screens, which often freeze for 30 seconds before spluttering back into life. We had some performance issues during battle too, with the visuals consistently freezing before big explosions. It's not enough to ruin fights, but it is noticeable.

It's a shame these minor frustrations exist, because behind them lies a deep, satisfying strategy game with an even better squad management sim tacked on. It could be kinder to new players, and it's not exactly a looker, but it really captures the feel of building up a group of toughened mercenaries from nothing. In fact, Peanut is still in our squad as we reach the end – but instead of cowering in a mech with no arms, he's in a behemoth with giant missile launchers strapped to each shoulder, skilfully raining pain down on his foes. ■

What is the best randomly-generated pilot nickname in the game? Muffintop. They sound lethal.

GM LOVES...

- Combat is deceptively deep and always tense.
- Mech customisation is brilliantly in-depth and engaging.

GM HATES...

- It doesn't explain its systems, so the first five hours are a slog.
- Long load times and occasional freezes are frustrating.

Better than...



MechWarrior Online
This solid first-person mech combat game shared its roots with BattleTech, but it was too short on game modes to keep players interested.

Worse than...



XCOM 2
BattleTech shares a lot of XCOM 2's DNA, but Firaxis' strategic alien hunter is more polished and explains its systems more clearly.

NEED TO KNOW



BattleTech is based on the long-running franchise of the same name, which originated as a tabletop game in 1984. The PC/Xbox MechWarriors games are also part of the series.

GM JUDGEMENT

79%



The testing combat is fun, and managing your squad of mercenaries is even better.
Samuel Horti



Whinge, whinge, whinge. Sure the people are freezing to death but they could at least *try* being upbeat about it.

Format PC **Publisher** 11 Bit Studios **Developer** 11 Bit Studios **ETA** Out now **Players** 1

FROSTPUNK

London calling to the faraway towns

There comes a time in everyone's life when the decision whether to use children to mine coal has to be made, and in Frostpunk it comes pretty darn early on. Set in an alt-history steampunk 1880s after climate catastrophe has frozen the Earth, coal is in short supply and very much needed for warmth and survival.

Of course we sign the law allowing it. We're Victorians, from London, after all. A child's place is in the chimney, or in t'mill, or down the coal mine. Someone, clearly a time traveller from the 21st century, complains that they should be studying rather than working, but we're not going to let such namby-pamby concerns get in the way of getting the coal in and stoking the boiler that keeps us all alive. They can study when they're warm… if we repeal the law.

Frostpunk, from This War of Mine veteran 11 Bit Studios, follows some similar themes to that earlier game, but instead of overseeing four survivors in a bunker you're made captain of the last city on Earth, hunkered in a crater and huddled around a steam boiler for warmth. When the game begins you've got just one generator and 40 homeless citizens to provide for, but both these numbers soon rise.

It's a tricky game to pigeonhole. It's a city-builder, certainly. Also a survival game. There's a hint of the RTS in the way you stockpile resources and unlock a tech tree, and maybe god games like Populous in the way you try to make a hostile land habitable for your citizens.

Mob the builder

It's the city building that makes up the game's core, and there's something rather beautiful in the way your settlement grows around the circular base of a steam hub, its radial asymmetry growing ever-outwards as your gang of workers does its stuff. At first it's driven by necessity and quickly reacting to problems – food, warmth, shelter – but as your city grows this changes. When you can afford to wait a few hours before acting, perhaps because of stockpiled supplies or the interminable wait for a cooldown timer, and actually put a bit of thought into what you're doing, you can clump together similar buildings and create districts.

Building isn't helped by the janky road-building mechanic, which sees you drag lines out from the central hub, tents and medical facilities shuffling aside just enough to let it pass, before waiting for workers to turn up and start building. All buildings must be erected by a road, otherwise they won't benefit from a warming connection to the steam hub, but it's not always clear why a particular road or site isn't connected.

The day/night cycle sees a variation in temperature, and while the towering automata you can construct or find will work tirelessly, your human charges need to rest. (Can't we pass a law against that?) Night can be a slow time in Frostpunk, as while they're happy to build in the dark, your citizens get discontented if asked to work 24-hour

> **"THE GAME GETS HARDER WHEN IT CONFRONTS YOU WITH THE OUTCOMES OF YOUR CHOICES"**

PROMISES AND DELIVERY

It's tough being a politician

As in real life, broken promises will anger people. Promise to do something and you've got a limited time in which to succeed – commitments entered into rashly, be it in the heat of idealism or because of a misunderstanding of the game's systems, will be punished upon failure by a rise in the Discontent bar and possibly riots among the population. Learning to manage expectations, to under-promise and over-deliver, is the key to maintaining a happy and hopeful city. It's an excellent representation of the way leaders are expected to deliver on what they say, and unlike in the real world the voters never forget.





Temperature view shows you hot and cold spots in your city, and is valuable when working out where to place heaters.



Automata are ridiculous steampunk creations that march on spindly legs like something out of Dishonored. We love them.

emergency shifts in what they've made. Two bars at the bottom of the screen represent their feelings, the red Discontent line rising in tandem with your stress levels, an extra chunk on the blue Hope streak coming like a soothing warm breeze.

Comments from individual citizens rise from the bottom of the screen, questioning whether you know what you're doing or expressing dissatisfaction with another day's work. There's more to stress you, though – losing a party of scouts we send out to explore, which had found lots of valuable resources, before they can return to the city proves particularly irksome – and little relief is to be found in the frozen wastes even as you discover the remains of other settlements and establish outposts to boost your resources.

Feeling that our masses deserve a few opiates, we institute a policy of encouraging church attendance. The religious buildings, though costly to erect, give a passive bonus to nearby houses, and the Hope bar begins to rise. We could have chosen another path, that of 'order,' but that sounded a bit fascist to us. Vicars on bicycles and church jumble sales are more like it – we are British, after all.

Fête worse than death

Soon, though, we begin to wonder if fascism wasn't the more honest choice. We have midnight parades led by gangs of armed fanatics, who we've encouraged with new laws and a building of their own. We even keep it heated so they won't fall ill like the workers at the sawmill do. It dawns on you that Frostpunk, though not a difficult game, gets harder when it confronts you with the outcomes of your choices. We signed those child labour laws blithely – though never touched the option that would have led them into dangerous occupations – yet find ourselves removing the kids from workplaces as soon as more adults or automata became available. The religious police that make us so aghast when we see them on the real-world TV news is a force to be reckoned with on our streets, signed into reality with a stroke of our pen. Soon we're allowing displays of public penance, even though this brings with it a threat of violence, just to prop up the Hope bar. We prop up a different kind of bar for a while, thinking about what we've done.

We wish there was a closer zoom level, as watching our citizens wade into chest-deep snow on a heroic hunt for food or march around the central hub with flaming torches is fascinating and the graphical presentation exquisite. Citizens are individually named, with homes, workplaces, and worries of their own. The labour that's gone into this level of detail, down to showing an automaton's footprints in the snow and the movements of workers on a building site, is hugely pleasing, and we would love to inspect it more closely.

Frostpunk is a hugely admirable creation. Its subject matter may be grim, but a game about supplying heat to a surviving colony inevitably brings a warmth of its own when things are going well – which, as long as you keep on top of resources, isn't too hard to achieve. The difficulty comes in challenging what it tells us about ourselves, the lengths we're prepared to go to to survive, and what the continuance of the human race is worth in terms of the suffering and degradation endured by individuals in the pursuit of a larger aim. ■

What do you get when you cross a snowman with a vampire? Frostbite

GM LOVES...

- ✔ Characterful animations bring the world to life.
- ✔ The game invests real meaning in bars going up and down.
- ✔ There's a chilly beauty to your city planning.

GM HATES...

- ✘ The road-building system is fiddly and unintuitive.

Better than...



Sim City (2013)
The urgent nature of your survival makes Frostpunk superior to almost any other city building game, and it looks great too...

Worse than...



Sim City (2013)
...but its lack of an endless mode means no long afternoons spent lazily planning the precise shape of a new housing block.

NEED TO KNOW



Unlike many other city building games Frostpunk has a defined end, but there are multiple scenarios to play through and each has replay value thanks to branches on the law tree.

GM JUDGEMENT

85%



City planning meets the survival of the human race in an Arctic wilderness, and it's snow joke.
Ian Evenden

PlayStation Official Magazine - UK

THE ESSENTIAL MAGAZINE FOR PLAYSTATION OWNERS



6 FREE TOMB RAIDER GIFTS!
4 DRINKS COASTERS
DOUBLE POSTER
& E-BOOK







FREE BONUS DIGITAL GIFT
DOWNLOAD OCTAHEDRON'S DIGI SOUNDTRACK



On sale now!

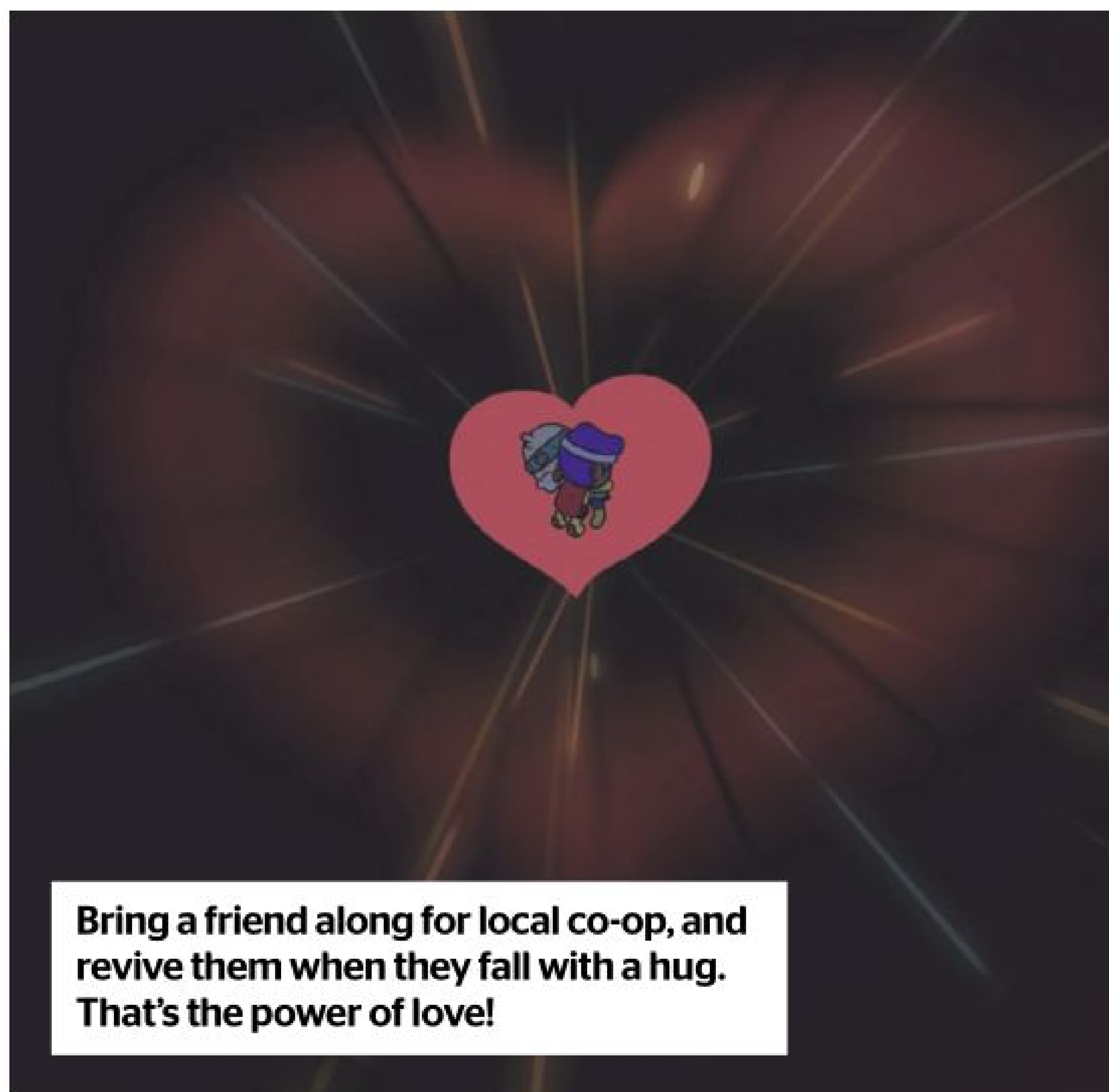
In print. On iOS. On Android

http://bit.ly/officialplaystation

Available on the App Store

Find it in the Official PlayStation Magazine App




Bring a friend along for local co-op, and revive them when they fall with a hug. That's the power of love!





Format PS4 (reviewed), PC **Publisher** Devolver Digital **Developer** Onebitbeyond **ETA** Out now **Players** 1-2

THE SWORDS OF DITTO

Repeat after me (and him, and her, and all them)

This is a game that, when you die, makes you wait 100 years before you can play again. "That's quite some loading time!" you're probably thinking to yourself, in yet another example of that charming humour we love you for. We've all had a chuckle; now let us explain.

It's a 100 *in-game* years. The land of Ditto, you see, suffers under a cyclical curse. Once a century, the evil witch Mormo arises to spread her darkness across the world. At the same time, a random citizen is chosen (by, er, a magical talking dung beetle) to be the new Sword Of Ditto; the chosen hero to stand against her. When one falls, the other celebrates their victory, and the whole thing starts over again 100 years later. Unless you find a way to break the curse…

In gameplay terms, therefore, you play the same mini-adventure over and over again. How to stop this getting very old very quickly? Procedural generation of the world, of course! The placement of every item, enemy, and NPC is different for each go round; even the name of the town is randomised. This works well for the caves and dungeons you'll be exploring, which always feel unique. There are, of course, some constants.

You get a set number of in-game days (dependent on difficulty) before the big fight. You can sleep through them and skip to the main event, but you'll weaken Mormo by finding and destroying her 'anchors'. You'll need a 'legendary toy' to solve the puzzles in each anchor dungeon, so the ideal pattern is toy dungeon – anchor dungeon – toy dungeon – anchor dungeon – Mormo's castle. Although dungeons are always unique, it seems a shame that there is only a total of four of these toys.

Sword off

If/when you die, the next Sword gets to keep your experience and cash by raiding the grave (lovely). All other items, including toys and food for healing, are usually lost. Nor do you get to keep any stickers (see Need To Know, right). Combined with the fact that enemies and dungeons level alongside you, you'll never advance to feel particularly powerful. If you defeat Mormo, the next Sword doesn't even get your cash.

It would've been easy for combat to prove dull, but this has been handled very well. Most enemy types require unique tactics if you want to defeat them without taking damage. Some flinch while others don't, some explode on death, some have magic abilities, and more. Overall, the experience remains fresh over many hours.

Our pre-release build had multiple bugs on both formats and, while a day one patch should have tackled the worst by the time you read this, we'll be surprised if everything is caught – especially the unexpected side effects of the procedural nature of the game. At one point, for example, an enemy spawns into a wall, unable to touch us. Elsewhere, it appears that a total of three unsolvable puzzles have been generated during our 14-ish hours with the game (thankfully, none to a game-breaking extent).

It's great fun when things are going smoothly, even if the repetitive nature of the experience means each victory feels slightly hollow. Just don't expect a strong story holding it all together. ■

"THE PLACEMENT OF EVERY LAST ITEM, ENEMY, AND NPC IS DIFFERENT FOR EACH ADVENTURE"

The hero eats sushi they find in a bush; can I do that too? GM pro tip: no.

GM LOVES...

- It's superbly drawn and animated. Look at those screens!
- Despite the repetition, it holds your interest and remains fun.

GM HATES...

- Rare technical hitches provide unwelcome bumps in the road.
- Only four toys to flavour dungeons is disappointing.

Better than...



The Flame In The Flood
Another procedurally generated adventure with striking art, but this survival game is just a little bit too keen to kill you.

Worse than...



Don't Starve
Although the emphasis here is on survival in a harsh environment rather than defeating evil, it offers a much tighter and more varied experience.

NEED TO KNOW



Find 'em, buy 'em, but most importantly equip 'em! Stickers buff stats and grant abilities; level up to earn more sticker slots and slap even more on. It's the best way to strengthen your character.

GM JUDGEMENT

75%



A little rough around the edges but, aptly enough, you'll keep coming back again and again.
Luke Kemp

NOW PLAYING

This month's biggest time sinks on Team GM



1 FROSTPUNK
PC
Keeping a colony of desperate survivors alive in a frozen post-apocalyptic wasteland has proved to be disappointingly easy compared to managing a games magazine.
Robin Valentine, editor



2 SUPER MARIO ODYSSEY
SWITCH
Six months and 500 moons later, I'm still chipping away at Nintendo's seemingly endless platformer. The more I play, the more I'm convinced it's the best game on Switch.
Robin Valentine, editor



3 MONSTER HUNTER WORLD
PS4
Still hunting – Capcom has been adding new monsters and events. Maybe this really will be the game that keeps me playing forever.
Sam Greer, staff writer



4 FAR CRY 5
PC
I'm enraptured by the map editor, Far Cry Arcade. It has a ludicrous number of options, including assets from AC Unity and Watch Dogs.
Sam Greer, staff writer



OFFICE LUNCHTIME GAME OF THE MONTH:
THE SWORDS OF DITTO
PS4
What better game for building team bonds than one where you can revive each other with a hug? Totally adorable.



Your tank gets a damage bonus for being at high health, while the berserker is buffed when his is low.

Format PC **Pub** Rablo Games **Dev** Rablo Games **ETA** Out now **Players** 1

HEALER'S QUEST

Taking a heal turn

This self-consciously quirky RPG casts you as a healer trying to keep a party of foolhardy, unappreciative adventurers alive as they delve into monster-filled dungeons (anyone who's played a support character in an MMO will be able to relate).

It's an intriguing idea, to be sure, but unfortunately Healer's Quest stumbles in the execution. The worst offender is the writing, which cludges together a hundred tired RPG gags into a thin, weightless story. It's the sort of game that treats simply invoking a cliche as equivalent to a joke – it's no surprise, for example, to find its first dungeon full of giant rats.

Distressing damsels

This proves especially tedious when the game's crude attitude to gender politics rears its ugly head. If you thought we'd all moved on from tropes such as perpetually horny men and women as quest rewards, you'd sadly be wrong. The intent is parody, but it falls so flat as to mostly just be guilty of the things it makes fun of, and the adult 'humour' of these scenes feels totally at odds with the game's cutesy, welcoming art style.

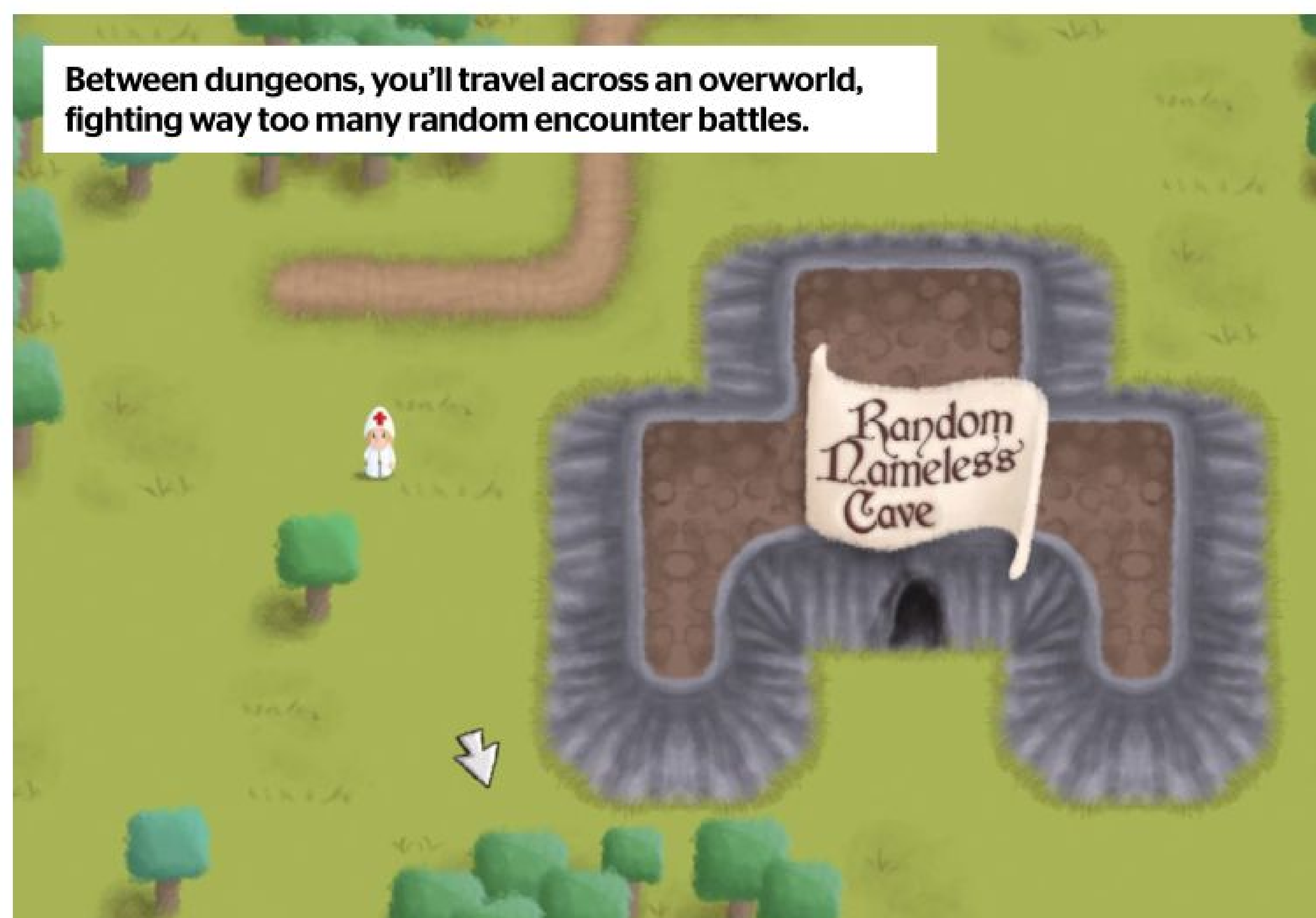
Combat is simply dull, mostly consisting of just clicking on your allies' health bars when they get too low as you grind through semi-random encounters. A decently diverse range of spells to choose from, each with its own upgrade tree, adds some strategy, but with only four equippable at a time, there's too little room to experiment. Ultimately the smoothest path through each dungeon is just to fall back on a few obvious standbys that unlock an hour or so into the game, quickly rendering battles totally repetitive.

Outside of your spellbook, you can also tweak things by adjusting your allies' equipment, and deciding when they use their special moves. These options, though welcome for the depth they add, feel at odds with the game's central conceit– if you're the unappreciated underdog, why would the party let you dole out the loot and decide what they spend their money on?

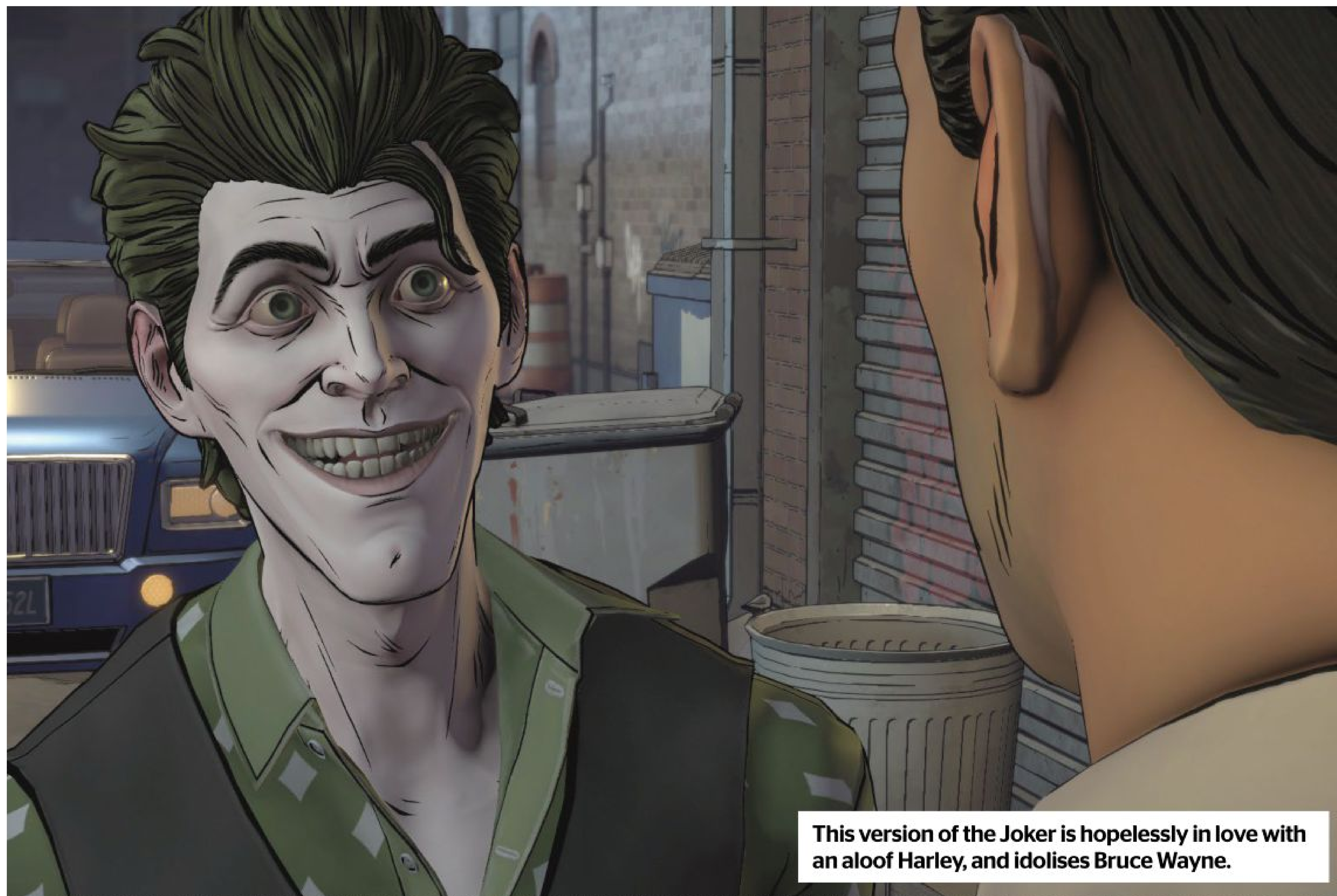
We're unfortunately left with little good to say about Healer's Quest. Despite its original premise, it ultimately brings nothing new to the already long overmined RPG parody genre beyond a pretty uninteresting twist on combat. ■

Robin Valentine

35%



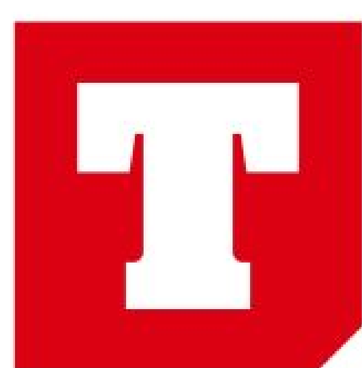
Between dungeons, you'll travel across an overworld, fighting way too many random encounter battles.


This version of the Joker is hopelessly in love with an aloof Harley, and idolises Bruce Wayne.

Format PS4, XO, PC (reviewed), Mobile **Pub** Telltale Games **Dev** Telltale Games **ETA** Out now **Players** 1

BATMAN: THE ENEMY WITHIN – THE TELLTALE SERIES

Making a monster



The idea that Batman and The Joker are more alike than the former will admit – "two threads in the same stitch", as this game puts it – isn't new, but it's never been explored quite like this.

The first season of Telltale's take on Batman was hit and miss for us, but it laid solid foundations with its startlingly original take on the caped crusader and his enemies. This second go round has built on them admirably, crafting a far more consistent and compelling story.

The set-up sees Batman facing off against supervillain group The Pact, with each member a fresh take on a classic villain – from Bane to Riddler to Mr Freeze. Particularly enthralling is Telltale's Harley Quinn, here a charismatic yet brutal leader invested with genuine agency of her own, rather than a sidekick or victim.

Clowning around

There's action and mystery aplenty across the five episodes, but the real core of the story is the relationship between Bruce Wayne and 'John Doe'. John is a sort of Joker-in-the-making, deeply troubled and in the sway of criminals, but not yet the murderous agent of chaos he might become. Crucially, thanks to the events of his introduction in the first season, he sees Bruce as his closest friend and role model, and how you navigate that relationship shapes his personality for both better and worse.



The game plays with, and frequently subverts, your expectations of a Batman story.

It's a fascinating twist on the classic pairing that plays with their familiarity to the audience – in every warm moment or sudden spat, our memories of the hundreds of Batman-Joker stories that have come before add a brilliant tension.

And, ultimately, the player is given a remarkable amount of freedom in how things end up. As with all Telltale games, many events are set in stone, but there's more genuine divergence possible here than we've seen in its past titles. The last episode, particularly, changes hugely based on your choices.

After a rocky few years, this is Telltale back on top form, with one of our new favourite Batman stories in any medium.

■ ***Robin Valentine***

90%

HOT DOWNLOADS

The latest DLC and expansions explored



If the news that **Middle-earth: Shadow Of War** is removing its lootboxes has you interested to peek back in on it, we've got good news – there's a whole new DLC adventure for it out now! **The Desolation Of Mordor** stars Baranor, loyal captain of Minis Ithil, as he battles his way through the deserts of eastern Mordor. As a lowly human, Baranor can't come back from the dead or mind control orcs, but he makes up for it with an arsenal of canon-defying gadgets – including a Just Cause-esque grappling hook and parachute – and an army of Easterling mercenaries.



Also hoping to draw players back in this month is **Destiny 2**, which has launched its **Warmind** expansion. New missions see you investigating the ruins of Clovis Bray, a Golden Age megacorporation on Mars responsible for all sorts of advanced super-tech – including the AI Rasputin. Along with this slice of story, you'll also get a new wave-based survival mode in which hordes of Hive descend on a Warmind antenna that you're charged with protecting.

And hey, while you're at it, why not give **Battlezone** another shot, too? The new **Gold Edition** lets you play the PS VR launch game without a headset for the first time, and is also available on Xbox One, with a Switch version to come in the summer. And if you own the original, you'll get the update for free.



Also free are **Total War Warhammer**'s new **Giant Slayers.** These ginger nutters fight for the Dwarf faction with huge two-handed axes, and specialise in... well, slaying giants, duh, as well as any other massive beasties that get in their way. As a more elite upgrade over the standard Slayers, they should give your Dwarf armies a bit of added punch.

After all that excitement, you'll probably just want a bit of chill-out time. **Cities: Skylines**' new **Parklife** expansion should be just the ticket, providing expanded mechanics and options for setting up your own little spots of peaceful greenery in your bustling (all the people – oh so many people) metropolis. Lovely.





THIS MONTH IN...
VERDANT VACATIONS

The Elder Scrolls Online expansion, Summerset, launches 21 May. No, not Somerset. Don't expect to be tracking down fine ciders or battling the Witch Of Wookey Hole. Instead you'll be visiting the Crystal Tower on the High Elves' island home, joining the mystical Psijic Order, and battling gryphons. There is jewellery crafting, though, so it's not a whole world away from the English county.





The true masters remember staving off dizziness when pulling off this particular (literal) combo loop.



TONY HAWK'S PRO SKATER 3

Reflecting on the Birdman's greatest hit

It might have risked being lost in the mix; one of the middle releases in the early run of Tony Hawk's titles, bridging a generation and without a soundtrack *quite* as good as those of the two games preceding it. And yet Tony Hawk's Pro Skater 3 has gone down in history as the best in the series for many a purist.

The origin

The birth of the Birdman's third licensed game couldn't have been more banal: there had been two previous titles with Tony Hawk's name attached (and so two previous opportunities for Brits to act confused as they thought it was a game based on comedian Tony Hawks) and both games had done really well, so Activision ordered a third entry from the team at Neversoft. By this point the formula had been established: time-based challenges in arena levels, in which you were tasked with a variety of goals impossible to complete all in one sitting, thus encouraging repeat playthroughs. A straightforward template for making sure players would play again and again, get better as they played, and so want to play *even more*. Those cunning devs…

It wasn't just more of the same – that wouldn't be characteristic of a true legend. No, THPS3 added one element that made sure the series was never the same again, and that no head-to-head contest between friends would ever be low-scoring: the revert. A legitimate skateboarding technique, yes, but more importantly a bridge between landing after a series of tricks and jumping into a manual, allowing the combo to continue. Combos – and scores – were once limited by how long you could stay in the air or keep your balance on a lip or rail. The ability to revert dumped this limitation, and with it we ended up with one of the best combo-based multiplayer games anybody has ever seen.

The legend

There was more to it than just the revert, and THPS3 was always more than enough fun played alone, though the true joy of the experience was playing with friends trying to outdo one another. Still, the mix of real-world skaters and locations (albeit with fantasy skate parks; Rio de Janeiro isn't so friendly towards real skaters), special hidden characters from the likes of Star Wars and the X-Men, and the ability to make your own custom skater – and suitably overpower them as you earned attribute improvement points – meant there was a good deal of variety throughout. There's also the fact THPS3 was playable online in certain circumstances. The PC version offered an online mode, and it was the first game to be playable online on PS2 (THPS3 actually released before the console's online adapter). Basically, there was a lot going on beyond the ability to revert. But wow, that revert was a genuine game-changer.

Developer Neversoft
Publisher Activision
Released 2001
Format PC, GameCube, GBA, PS2, N64, PS1
Get it From the likes of eBay or Amazon

We were suitably wowed by THPS3 back in the day, awarding the GameCube version an impressive 92% on its release. The PC, Xbox, and PS2 all saw very slight variations of the same game released (which version you chose came down more to controller preference than anything else), while the previous generation ended up with a PS1 and N64 version that, pretty much, just added the ability to revert to Tony Hawk's 2. Even these downscaled versions were great fun, it has to be said, though the real meat was with the consoles (and computers) with more horsepower.

The legacy

While extreme sports games centred on other stars never quite captured the magic, the Tony Hawk name retained its sparkle and Pro Skater 3 was followed by 10 sequels of ever-decreasing quality. Some were good, some *moments* in

"WE ENDED UP WITH ONE OF THE BEST COMBO-BASED MULTIPLAYER GAMES ANYBODY HAS EVER SEEN"



All hail the brilliant, new for this game, revert-into-manual combo extender.







The PS1 and N64 versions were fun, but really just upgraded versions of THPS2.

them were great, and some were genuinely awful – please don't ever be tempted to try out Tony Hawk: Ride, even if the skateboard peripheral looks like fun. But however good, or poor, the Tony Hawk's games that followed number three ended up being, none managed to capture the sheer joy of THPS3.

So it was that Activision went back to the well and tried to recapture that old glory, but with Neversoft tied up in Guitar Hero updates and working on parts of Call Of Duty: Ghosts there wasn't much chance of any of the original team working on these attempts to bring the past back. Tony Hawk's Pro Skater HD was a remake of the first three games in shiny high definition, and played like a much buggier version of said originals, though with the ability to revert in any level from any game, while 2015's Tony Hawk's Pro Skater 5 was a cynical, rushed attempt at reliving past glories that failed spectacularly in more ways than one. And so we end up here, today, with the absolute knowledge that the greatest game this series ever produced – and one of the finest games of all time – was the third one in a sequence of 19. Who'da thunk it? ■

Studio Spotlight

Neversoft did games without skateboards, too







1 Skeleton Warriors

(PS1, Saturn – 1995)

Neversoft's first game was based on the short-lived (and excellent) cartoon series of the same name. Sadly it was a forgettable side-scrolling slasher, notable for little else beyond the license – and the fact bats would explode when hit with your sword. Fortunately this wasn't the beginning of a trend for the studio, and better things were soon to come.

2 Apocalypse

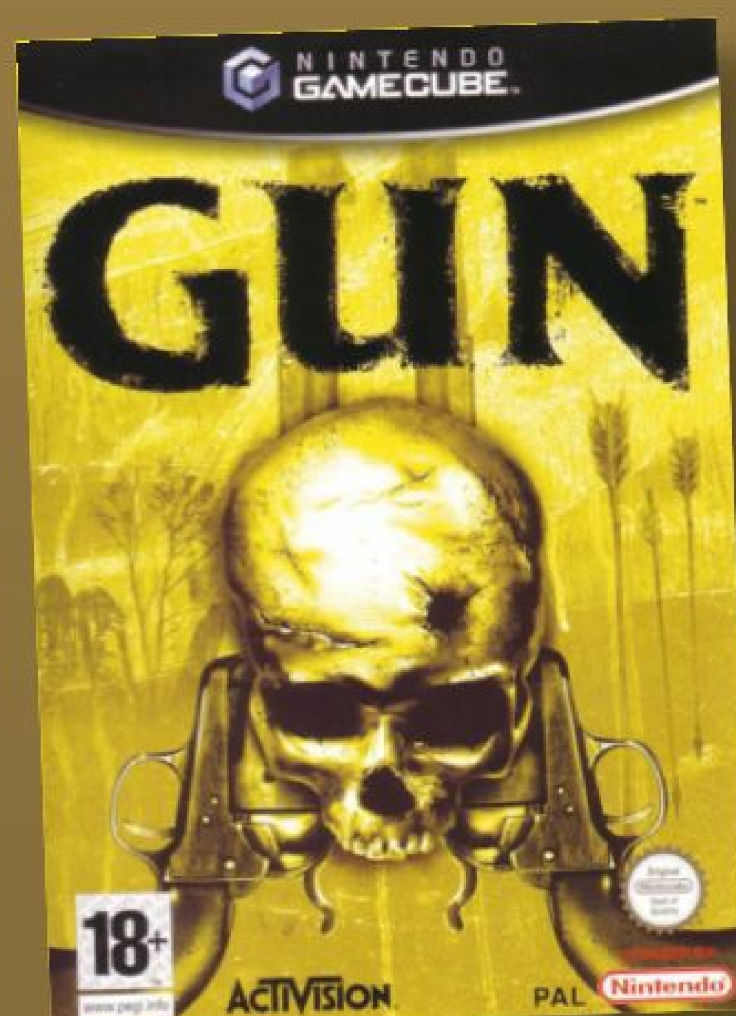
(PS1 – 1998)

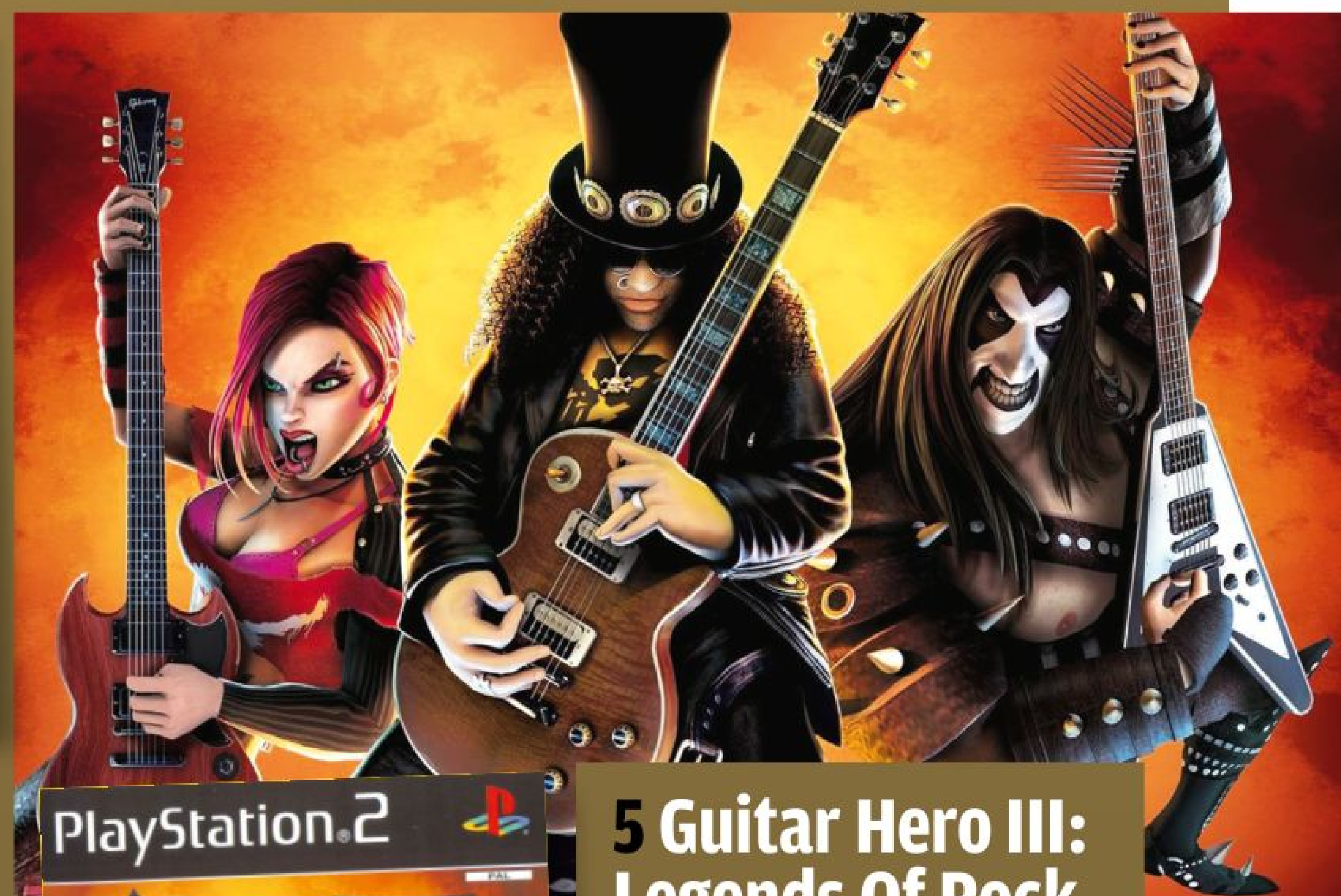
Those better things, though, didn't arrive in the shape of Apocalypse – the game not based on any movie, but for some reason featuring the digitised mug of one Bruce Willis nonetheless. Not even a bunch of quips from the guy we all know as John McClane could save this utterly mediocre shooter from deserved oblivion. At this point it may have been hard to believe that Neversoft was destined for videogaming greatness…

3 Spider-Man

(PC, Dreamcast, N64, PS1 – 2000)

In the year 2000 we were still getting over the fear of the millennium bug (we were stupid back then), so the appearance of anything known to get rid of troublesome bugs was more than welcome. Fortunately Neversoft's take on Spidey ended up going down in history as one of the best licensed games ever made, with the Tony Hawk's engine used to superb effect. And its use of all-encompassing fog to excuse its low draw distance was so ballsy we have to respect it even now.





4 Gun

(360, GameCube, Xbox, PS2 – 2005)

Well before Red Dead Redemption (but just after its often-overlooked forebear Red Dead Revolver), Neversoft brought us a taste of open world westerns that went down pretty well back in the day. It was never going to be an all-time classic – and Rockstar's game blew it out of most of our memories – but Gun was a fun game in its own right that's worth tracking down today. If only to see Neversoft was capable of making games that didn't have a license attached.

5 Guitar Hero III: Legends Of Rock

(PC, PS3, Wii, 360, PS2 – 2007)

With Harmonix taken under the wing of MTV in 2006, Activision needed a new studio to work on its flagship strum-'em-up. And what better team than Neversoft, accomplished as it was with all things licensed? GHIII was the first Hero title from the team, and while it lost an indefinable *something* from the Harmonix days, there's no doubt the adopted parents of the franchise gave Guitar Hero a good go.

SIX OF THE BEST...
DESTRUCTIVE GAMES

Because who doesn't love a bit of smashy-smashy?

As much as it's fun to destroy things, to knock them down, to make a mess in the real world, you always have to tidy up at the end of it. Or you get in trouble for 'making a scene'. Or the police are called. Basically it's just better to annihilate things in the world of games, where destruction can be ramped up to ludicrous levels and the authorities never have to be called. Also you never have to tidy up, which is a far worse punishment than anything the legal system could dole out. With the spirit of breaking stuff in our hearts, here are six of the best games that embrace a destructive spirit in their own way. They're all, it's safe to say, smashing. ■

MERCENARIES: PLAYGROUND OF DESTRUCTION
(Xbox, PS2 – 2005)

Mercenaries took its 'Playground' title to heart, offering the chance to eliminate entire regions of the map – albeit temporarily – in your quest to apprehend war criminals.

RED FACTION: GUERRILLA
(PS3, 360, PC – 2009)

There are games with hammers, then there are games with ostrich hammers. This was the ultimate in destructive *mucking about* – you could destroy almost everything created by humans should you so wish.

SILENT STORM
(PC – 2003)

This turn-based tactics game took destruction to ridiculous levels, and often found players finishing levels with literally nothing intact. Best of all, you could destroy things for a tactical advantage... or just because it's fun.



BLAST CORPS

(N64 - 1997)

One of Rare's first games on N64 was an unexpected gem, offering you all the glory of working as a bulldozer driver clearing the way for a truck carrying a nuclear warhead. Whether you failed or succeeded, destruction was always guaranteed.

DEFCON

(PC - 2006)

Now for something a smidge different - while Defcon didn't include the visual destruction of the other games on this list, most games did end with billions dead and countless cities destroyed in a nuclear fire. So, you know, a regular Saturday evening.



THE INCREDIBLE HULK: ULTIMATE DESTRUCTION

(GameCube, Xbox, PS2 - 2005)

Well the clue's in the name. Hulk's adventure was an exercise in how to dilute its titular character down to his most defining activity: breaking stuff.

Grab Bag

Retro gems from every era

It's Still Good!



Freespace 2

Format PC **Developer** Volition **Released** 1999

The vanilla package you get from Steam and GOG is still good fun, but what makes space sim Freespace 2 really shine in the modern era is its army of mods. As well as just making things look a bit nicer, you can go further and change the *entire game* to campaigns based on the likes of TV shows Battlestar Galactica and Babylon 5 - all for free.

Classic Moment!



Moonstone: A Hard Day's Knight

Format Amiga, PC **Developer** Mindscape **Released** 1991

A cult fave with a truly classic moment at the end of most battles, Moonstone was a multiplayer RPG in which you were able to lop the heads off your friends in spectacular fashion. Or, of course, they could be the ones doing the lopping. It remains a brilliant - if rather gory - way to end a pitched one-on-one swordfight, and an enduring memory for those who lived (and lopped) through it.

Remake Request!



The Elder Scrolls III: Morrowind

Format PC, Xbox **Developer** Bethesda Softworks **Released** 2002

There are fan-made projects to dress the Elder Scrolls' most fantastical entry in shiny new clothes, but there's one remake we want: an official Bethesda do-over, for Switch. Being able to get lost again in the world of Vvardenfell, marvelling at those massive mushrooms and accidentally killing a god (thus rendering further story progress impossible) - all on the go? That would be *bliss*.

CREATURE CRAFTING

We talk to artist **Laura Mercer** about her cosplay creations – and what it takes to make a full-body Hogger costume





Mercer posts videos on her YouTube channel explaining in detail how she creates her impressive costumes. Here's a skinless Hogger.



Lighter than some of Mercer's other cosplays, Hogger's whole head and neck structure weighs five and a half pounds.

There's no shortage online of fans' real-life interpretations of their virtual heroes, and while famous faces such as Lara Croft and Solid Snake are firm cosplay favourites, other artists aspire to bring more niche characters to life, ones whose designs are beyond the realms of possibility for all but the most talented and dedicated costume artists. Artists such as Laura Mercer, aka Kazplay, whose work includes intricately detailed and extremely lifelike replica costumes of some of gaming's coolest creatures.

Mercer regards her full-body costume of World Of Warcraft's Hogger as her most ambitious cosplay to date. Such an elaborate undertaking as this requires a lot of preliminary work, as she explains: "I started by doing lots of sketching and making lists of features I wanted to try to have. I spent a lot of time researching and testing new materials I wanted to use. I sculpted maquettes to help me get an idea of the forms and scope of the body shaping I needed. I took my tests a step farther by building a cardboard mock-up of the costume pieces. After I was satisfied with my tests, I moved into the actual construction."

Mercer admits to spending almost 500 hours over a year on the project. This meant five months of planning and researching and seven months of building, including redoing aspects to ensure the finished piece looked and moved exactly right: "I built the flexible neck structure and threw it away three times. The fourth build is the one that actually worked!"

Blizz kid

All that effort paid off as she fought off competition from cosplays of the Prophet Velen from World Of Warcraft and StarCraft's Jim Raynor to be crowned the winner of the 2017 BlizzCon cosplay contest. "It was incredible. I admit I was completely shocked and in denial when I was on stage," says Mercer. "It sank in after leaving the stage and I couldn't help but smile and cry. Winning BlizzCon was a huge goal in my life for five years. Each year my skills improved and my cosplays got more ambitious. To finally have achieved my goal was overwhelming, and to have so many people cheering and congratulating me made it an absolutely unforgettable moment."

Mercer doesn't just look the part, she embodies the essence of the character. When asked why she chose Hogger, she says: "I had two goals: I wanted to prioritise movement and finish. I wanted to be agile in costume so I could really put a lot of character into the performance. I also wanted a character that I could have a lot of fun on textures and weathering with. Hogger ended up being a perfect combination because he's a maniacal, bloodthirsty, smiling, filthy hyena thing that lives in the woods. I was very excited to make him look like he smelt really bad and to chase down people who were still scared of him from vanilla World Of Warcraft."

Mercer's been honing her talent since an early age and began creating costumes after starting college in

> "I WAS VERY EXCITED TO MAKE HIM LOOK LIKE HE SMELT REALLY BAD"



Hogger accepted his BlizzCon cosplay contest win with a moving speech of snarls and stomps.



These creations can be randomly positioned around the house for maximum scares.



World Of Warcraft is the basis for many of Mercer's monstrously magnificent cosplays, such as Genn Greymane here, but she's also a big fan of the Dark Souls, Zelda, and Uncharted series.





2009, while 2013's BlizzCon costume contest marked her first foray into cosplay. Her talents span a wide range of artistic media, including a degree in 3D animation, which led to her working on Animal Jam for five years.

In for the skill

Being able to use many skills is one of the aspects Mercer enjoys most about cosplay. "I use skills that I pick up everywhere in my costumes. My mother showed me how to sew when I was very young and I practised those skills by making plush animals. I loved playing with clay growing up and taught myself how to make jewellery and miniature figures. I even use principles and skills learned in my 3D animation schooling in my cosplay work. I love watching tutorials on YouTube and reading blogs from all sorts of creative folks to increase my knowledge, and then I figure out how to apply those things I've learned to cosplay."

Fully aware of the daunting nature of delving into the world of cosplay, Mercer has some apt advice for those considering taking up the craft: "Just start! Everyone starts somewhere, and you will learn more by actually building, completing, and wearing a cosplay to a convention than you will by just watching YouTube tutorials or by always leaving your project unfinished." She adds, "The quicker your first one is done the quicker you can move on and build the next one with all the things you learned."

As for Mercer, she's got a few more ideas for future costumes that promise to be just as fearsome and fantastic – and every bit as challenging to build – as her previous award-winning work: "I am working on building a Bloodborne Hunter cosplay, and planning a few other beasts from that game. I am also working on scheduling my builds for next BlizzCon." ■ ***Anne-Marie Coyle***

SEE THIS! SEE THIS! SEE THIS! SEE THIS! SEE THIS! SEE THIS! SEE THIS! SEE THIS! SEE THIS! SEE THIS! SEE THIS!

See this

Get a behind-the-scenes look at Laura's work and see how her cosplays come together at bit.ly/gmkazplay



GLOBAL MASTER

The costliest collector's editions



CASH AND CARRY

This £169.99 Destiny 2 Collector's Edition is chock-full of goodies, including a snazzy Frontier Bag and a Frontier Kit with a solar panel USB charger, paracord, and solar blanket. Warning: regularly indulge in this kind of extravagance and your destiny is probably to part with an organ or two.

WHEEL OF FORTUNE

If you'd like to add a statue of JD Fenix riding a COG bike added to your hoard, look no further than the Gears Of War Ultimate Collector's Edition. Priced at £199.99, this souped-up version also includes a frag grenade key chain, lithograph, steelbook, and season pass.

WHADDAYA BUYIN'?

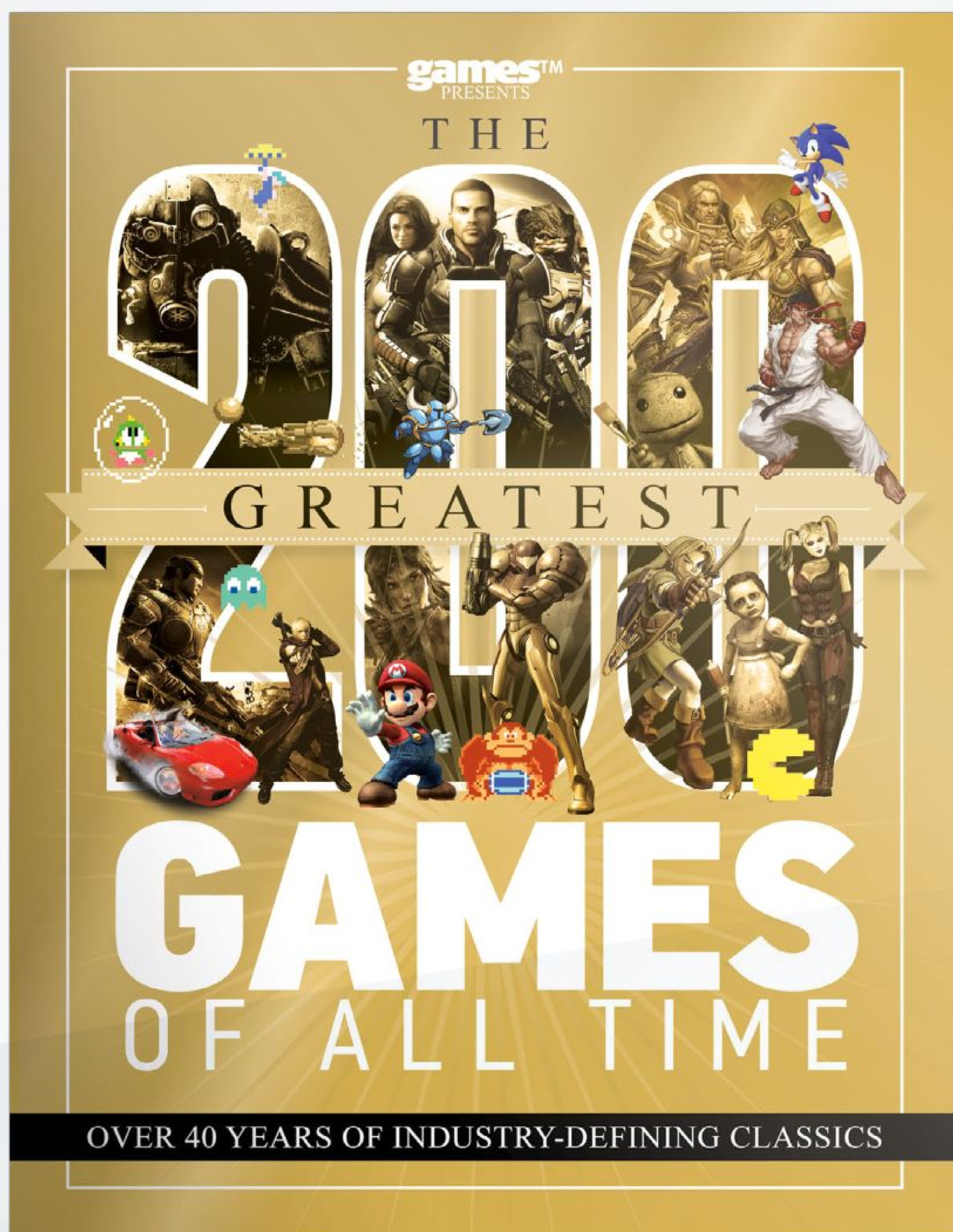
If dropping less than £200 on a collector's edition seems sheer lunacy, then the Resident Evil 6 Leather Jacket Edition might be more your style. This replica of Leon's jacket comes in at £899, and considering it's now sold out, expect to pay more should you manage to track it down.



TWO MAGAZINES IN ONE!

Available from all good newsagents & supermarkets





gamesTM

200TH ISSUE

SPECIAL EDITION! THE 200 GREATEST GAMES OF ALL TIME – BONUS MAGAZINE

Available at www.myfavouritemagazines.co.uk

ON SALE NOW

 facebook.com/gamesTM  twitter.com/gamesTMmag



NEXT MONTH...

GamesMaster 331

ON SALE 14 JUNE



The hottest gaming news, previews, and reviews every month!

INSIDE NEXT ISSUE...

LEGO Disney · PIXAR THE INCREDIBLES



RED DEAD REDEMPTION 2



METRO EXODUS



DETROIT: BECOME HUMAN

PLUS LOADS MORE!

Due to the unpredictable nature of the gaming world, all contents are subject to change.

GamesMaster

GAME GUIDE

Our definitive list of the best games to play right now

Not sure which games to grab? Trust the experts (that's us) to shine a light of clarity through your fog of confusion. Over this spread you'll find GamesMaster's 100 per cent scientifically accurate and indisputable list of the greatest games on modern machines – updated monthly – as well as the top five most vital exclusives on each of the major platforms. Pick one of these up and, buddy, you're going to have yourself a good time.





1

THE LEGEND OF ZELDA: BREATH OF THE WILD

Switch / Wii U

Nintendo casually revolutionises the open-world genre with perhaps the best launch title ever. Explore, fight, and cook your way across Hyrule.



2

GRAND THEFT AUTO V

PS4 / XO / PC / PS3 / 360

Rockstar's most detailed, immersive cityscape yet serves as the backdrop for a brilliantly explosive, multi-layered crime saga.



3

THE WITCHER 3: WILD HUNT

PS4 / XO / PC

An unbelievably vast fantasy world, where grim adventure – and brilliantly mature, engaging storytelling – lurks around every corner.



4

THE LAST OF US

PS4 / PS3

Naughty Dog's greatest triumph yet: the dark and truly cinematic tale of Joel and Ellie, two survivors in a dying world.



5

SHADOW OF THE COLOSSUS

PS4

A perfect remake of a genuinely awe-inspiring adventure. So good we gave it our first ever 100% review score back in GM327.



DARK SOULS III

PS4 / XO / PC

Take on some of gaming's most unforgiving enemies in weighty, impactful battles. There are few games more satisfying to beat.



PERSONA 5

PS4 / PS3

The greatest JRPG on current-gen – a stylish, rebellious story of teenage fury and surreal journeys into your enemies' minds.


8

MONSTER HUNTER WORLD
PS4 / XO / PC

The once-cult series finally hit the mainstream with this stunning entry. Hunt big dinosaurs with your mates and make armour from their bits!


9

HORIZON: ZERO DAWN
PS4

A truly unique vision from the creators of Killzone. Primitive humans hunt robotic beasts across a beautiful wilderness.


10

SUPER MARIO ODYSSEY
Switch / Wii U

Switch's first Mario game is also one of the best ever, taking you on an unashamedly joyous, globe-trotting adventure.


11

UNCHARTED 4: A THIEF'S END
PS4

An incredible end to one of the most spectacular series around, seeing Nathan Drake off in style. One of the best-looking games ever made.


12

FORZA MOTORSPORT 7
XO / PC

The best entry in the series yet, and one of the greatest racing games ever made. It's absolutely gorgeous to boot.


13

OVERWATCH
PS4 / XO / PC

Colourful characters and slick shooting make this multiplayer FPS from the makers of World Of Warcraft utterly irresistible.


14

MARIO KART 8
Switch / Wii U

The definitive kart racer, now portable and packed with new features on Switch. Own a Nintendo console? This is a must-have.


15

XCOM 2
PS4 / XO / PC

A turn-based strategy masterpiece that doesn't pull its punches. Try not to get too attached to your soldiers, eh?


16

MIDDLE-EARTH: SHADOW OF WAR
PS4 / XO / PC

Solid third-person action elevated by its incredible system of procedurally-generated orcs, each with their own personality.


17

TOWERFALL ASCENSION
Switch / PS4 / XO / PC / PS Vita

A true legend of local multiplayer action that still eats up our office lunchtimes to this day. The very definition of easy to learn, hard to master.


18

HELLBLADE: SENUA'S SACRIFICE
PS4 / PC

A harrowing journey into a mythological underworld serves as the perfect backdrop to an exploration of real-world mental illness.


19

METAL GEAR SOLID V: THE PHANTOM PAIN
PS4 / XO / PC / PS3 / 360

Hideo Kojima's last hurrah brings open-world action to the revered series.


20

DOTA 2
PC

A strange and intimidating beast – but take the time to learn its secrets and you'll find a game of incredible tactical depth and variety.


21

HEARTHSTONE
PC / Mobile

Blizzard achieves the once-impossible – making deck-building CCGs accessible to all. Prepare to lose all your free time in 15-minute chunks.


22

MARIO + RABBIDS KINGDOMS BATTLE
Switch

Don't let its cute looks fool you – this is a tight and devilishly difficult turn-based strategy game.



BLOODBORNE
PS4

Dark Souls' more agile cousin, tighter and faster but no less punishing, in a world of gothic horror and Lovecraftian nightmares.


24

RESIDENT EVIL 7: BIOHAZARD
PS4 / XO / PC

First-person horror action that both pays fitting tribute to the series' past, and tries something totally different. Even more terrifying in VR.


25

PYRE
PS4 / PC

This spellbinding follow-up to Bastion seamlessly blends intricate storytelling with… well, magical basketball, basically. Trust us, it works.

THE TOP EXCLUSIVES
The five best for each console



1. FORZA MOTORSPORT 7
2. HALO 5: GUARDIANS
3. KALIMBA
4. QUANTUM BREAK
5. GEARS OF WAR 4



1. THE LAST OF US REMASTERED
2. SHADOW OF THE COLOSSUS
3. HORIZON: ZERO DAWN
4. UNCHARTED 4: A THIEF'S END
5. HELLBLADE



1. THE LEGEND OF ZELDA: BREATH OF THE WILD
2. SUPER MARIO ODYSSEY
3. MARIO KART 8 DELUXE
4. MARIO + RABBIDS KINGDOM BATTLE
5. ARMS



1. DOTA 2
2. TOTAL WAR: WARHAMMER II
3. GUILD WARS 2
4. THE SIMS 4
5. CRUSADER KINGS 2



1. POKÉMON SUN AND MOON
2. FIRE EMBLEM FATES
3. ANIMAL CROSSING: NEW LEAF
4. MONSTER HUNTER GENERATIONS
5. THE LEGEND OF ZELDA: A LINK BETWEEN WORLDS



1. HEARTHSTONE
2. DEVICE 6
3. 80 DAYS
4. SORCERY 4
5. MONUMENT VALLEY

MONSTER MASH-UP

Using cutting-edge genetic engineering, we've designed the perfect dinosaur. Presenting: the GamesMastersaurus!

EYES OF A KILLER
You've got to have a T. rex part. We grabbed the best bit – those shiny peepers.

SOLID CHOMPERS
Forget sharp teeth, this beastie's got a bite like a table vice. Watch yourself.

DEFENSIVE CREST
Intimidating yet practical, this spiny ridge ensures a safe noggin.

LOOKOUT TAIL
No raptor's ambushing our girl – she's alert to danger from any direction.

HEADFISTS
Who needs rubbish little hands? These bronto heads are great for both battle and grazing.

RACING STRIPE
This natty look keeps her at the cutting edge of dinosaur fashion.

All-Star Fruit Racing ©



Pre-order Now!

amazon.co.uk

3DClouds.it pqube

© 3DClouds.it - a division of FORMEX SRL. All rights reserved. Published by PQube Limited.

CROSSOUT

CRAFT • RIDE • DESTROY

WWW.CROSSOUT.NET











9020